

The Snow King

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The Snow King

by [Poker](#)

Summary

When Tubbo's friend Tommy is stolen away by the Winter Court, he refuses to let him go without a fight. Armed with his wits and a compass, he agrees to a dangerous wager: gather a charm from each Faerie court and bring them back before the winter solstice.

Everyone expects Tubbo to lose, to disappear into the clutches of another Court. But Tubbo plans to win, and bring his friend home.

Notes

This is inspired by chapters 60 and 61 of JadeSpeedster17's Sleepy Bois Prompts and AUs. You all should go check out their stuff! They're awesome.

Also, this is completely platonic by the way!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

- Inspired by [Sleepy Bois Prompts and AUs](#) by [JadeSpeedster17](#)

Blizzard

The Winter Court is as terrible as it is beautiful. As many stories there are of a glorious castle sculpted out of ice alone, of rulers wise and powerful, and hidden treasures brimming with magic; there are just as many of the inhabitants' cruelty and darkness towards mortals. Their hearts are colder than the ice surrounding their home. They love only those of the Winter Court.

None who climb their mountain have ever come back.

"I'm just saying, both of us are at fault here." Tommy said, ducking under a branch laden in snow. "If you hadn't picked the path that went next to the cow pen, we would have left hours ago."

They had set out bright and early that day to go to the market in the next town over to trade for supplies. As cozy as their little cottage was, the blizzards had been more and more fierce this winter and they were running low on supplies.

Tubbo shaded his eyes, checking the sky again and readjusting his backpack. Already dark clouds were beginning to roll in and the breeze was bitterly cold. He shivered, pulling his fluffy parka tighter around himself.

"Sorry for not considering your need to befriend every cow we see can't be outweighed by the need to get home before a blizzard comes down." Tubbo said drily.

"I'm glad you see it that way." Tommy said. Tubbo punched his shoulder, making the taller boy yelp and step further away. "Ow! Look, all we need to do is take the path through the pass! That'll get us home way quicker."

"That path. The one said to be haunted by the Fey. The one with the many stories of people disappearing on it." Tubbo said, staring at him. "The one even I usually stick to reading books about?"

It was rumored that the path marked the beginning of the Winter Court's territory. Beyond it, up the steep mountain slope to the very top where clouds hung as an eternal shroud, was where the Fey lived. And they despised trespassers. Those caught trespassing would be frozen solid, eternal ice sculptures to warn away the unwary.

Tubbo shivered at the thought. He didn't want to be an ice sculpture.

Tommy shrugged, glancing up at the clouds. "I'd rather take that chance than a 110% chance of getting trapped in a blizzard. If you're too chicken, I can go by myself and be nice and cozy at home while you're freezing your butt off in a cave somewhere."

"You wouldn't." Tubbo groaned as Tommy stepped off the path, heading for the break in the evergreens that marked the entrance to the mountain path. "I'm gonna need so much hot

chocolate to get over it.”

“Make some for me!” Tommy yelled over his shoulder. “Because I’m freezing my ass off out here.”

Tubbo jogged after him. As terrifying as the stories were, the path through the pass was inviting. Evergreens had shaded the pathway so the large snow drifts hadn’t built up quite yet and provided a break from the wind that had been digging their steps.

It would be okay. He told himself. Tubbo had his red bandanna and Tommy’s jacket was red. As long as they were quiet and drew no notice from the Winter Court, the protective magic should work. It was weak protective magic, wearing the color red, but it should be enough.

Still. He didn’t feel good about this.

They were still a mile out from their village when the wind suddenly increased. Tommy stopped, glancing up. “Is it just me, or are those clouds moving a lot faster now?”

“Don’t be silly.” Tubbo said. “Clouds can’t move that fast. Oh. Wait. Yeah, they can.”

The dark clouds spread across the sky like ink spilled from an inkwell, blocking out the weak sunlight in moments. Tommy snagged Tubbo’s jacket sleeve, nearly pulling him off his feet.

“Run!”

And then the snow hit.

Tubbo pulled his snow goggles down, squinting through the dense snowfall in front of them. “Head straight!” He yelled, trying to raise his voice over the wind. “Don’t get turned around!”

He heard Tommy yelling something back, his friend’s words ripped away by the wind.

And then the grip vanished on his sleeve.

Tubbo stopped, bracing himself against the howling wind. “Tommy?” He yelled. No answer. “TOMMY?”

He gritted his teeth, holding his arms wide as he trudged forward, trying to see Tommy’s brilliant red jacket through the snow. “Tommy!”

“TUBBO!”

Tubbo broke into a sprint, chasing after the voice. He didn’t care if he got lost. He needed to find Tommy. They could figure out how to get home together, he wouldn’t go home without him.

Tubbo yelped as his boots caught on something, sending him face first into the snow. He pushed himself back up, and nearly screamed at the sight of crimson red in the snow.

Oh. It was his jacket. “Tommy!” Tubbo yelled, scrambling forward to brush away the snow and pull Tommy up.

Tommy didn’t answer, his blue eyes vacantly staring at the snow. Tubbo pressed into his side to keep him sitting up, wincing as the snow began to soak through his thick socks. “Tommy.” He repeated again.

Slowly, Tommy looked up at him. Tubbo frowned, looking closer. Were his eyes shining in the dim light? Human eyes couldn’t do that. Tommy glanced away quickly.

“Tubbo?” Tommy whispered. Tubbo had to strain to hear him with the wind.

“Yes.” Tubbo said. This didn’t feel right. Tommy was never ever quiet. How long were they separated by the storm? It had felt like only moments, even with the agonizing panic clouding his thoughts. “Yes. Your Tubbo. I need you to stand up. We can’t stay here.”

“They won’t be happy if I leave.” Tommy said, looking out into the snow. Tubbo froze. “But. My Tubbo.”

“Who?” Tubbo said, feeling numb. But Tommy was standing, forcing Tubbo to stagger to his feet as well. “Who?”

“It’s straight from here.” Tommy said, ignoring Tubbo. “I think it’s straight from here.”

Tubbo chewed his bottom lip. Maybe it could wait until they were in their warm cabin, instead of out in a blizzard. “Maybe.” He said. He didn’t move out from Tommy’s arm. It felt like the wind would snatch him away again as soon as Tubbo let go. “I can make hot chocolate.”

“You fucking better.” Tommy said, having to crane his head awkwardly so he could talk into Tubbo’s ear. “I’m fucking freezing.”

“Maybe we could have it with marshmallows.” Tubbo said. Unease still churned in his stomach but that got him a real Tommy smile. “I think we still have some in the cabinets.”

He never felt more relief then when they saw the window lantern through the snow.

The cabin itself was a bit rundown looking, the outer walls hastily reinforced with wooden planks to stop up the cracks in the walls. Tommy and Tubbo had been drifters before, skipping from town to town until they stumbled over an abandoned hunter’s cabin in the woods. They had spent all summer feverishly working to get it ready for the winter and now it was their home. Tubbo smiled at the memories.

It had never seemed more perfect. Except for maybe when they finally staggered inside, scattering snow over the carpet.

Tommy beelined straight for the cabinets. “Fuck yes!” He yelled. “We’ve got marshmallows!”

Tubbo hung behind, peeling his sodden backpack and jacket off. “Hey, Tommy?” He said. “Can I ask you something?”

“No, I’m not giving up the marshmallows. You practically promised I could have them.”

Tubbo giggled a little before stopping. “No. It’s just. Who were you talking about? What happened when I lost you?”

Tommy frowned, juggling the marshmallow container between his hands. “Nothing.” He said. “I lost my grip and then tripped. And then you found me.”

“But-“ Tubbo began. Why was Tommy laying in the snow then? Why say those strange words?

“I don’t want to fucking talk about it anymore.” Tommy said, an odd glint in his eye. “Also, I’m gonna take this as you don’t care about having marshmallows and I get to have all of them.”

“Hey!” Tubbo yelled, lunging forward.

But the memory still lingered, unshaken by hot cocoa, unpacking the loot, or when they finally went to bed. In fact, it still felt new when only days later, Tubbo woke to a freezing cold bed.

Across the room, the curtains billowed in the freezing cold breeze. Tubbo frowned at it. He distinctly remembered closing that window and locking it tight when the blizzards began.

“What the fuck?” Tubbo muttered, sitting up. Did someone break into their house? Tommy murmured sleepily from his side of the bed.

“It’s too early for talking.” He groaned into his pillow. Tubbo prodded him. “No.”

“Tommy. The windows open. I think someone broke into our house.” Tubbo said. He yelped as his feet hit the cold floorboards. “Some asshole who thinks it’s funny to let the freezing cold air in.”

“Nobody broke in. I opened it.” Tommy said, lifting his head off his pillow.

“Why the hell would you do that?” Tubbo said, wincing as he walked across the floor. He pushed the curtains aside, nearly swearing when a blast of cold air hit him. Grey dawn light filtered through the window, making Tommy groan again. Good. Now he can suffer with him.

“Got warm.” Tommy said. “You’re too warm. Blankets too heavy. Bed got too fucking hot and I couldn’t sleep.”

“Too warm?” Tubbo echoed. He shut and latched the window again, turning to stare at Tommy. “Usually you’re practically on top of me like the clingyinnit you are.”

“M not clingy. You’re the clingy one.” Tommy said sleepily. “Clingybo. And I dunno. Too warm. Cold air felt good.”

Tubbo walked across the floor, leaning over the bed and brushing the curls of Tommy's forehead. He pressed his palm against it. "You're freezing." Tubbo said. "I wouldn't be surprised if you caught a cold."

Tommy batted his hand away. "Your hand is too warm." He complained, rolling over to press his face back in the pillow. "I'm going back to bed. Fuck off."

Tubbo frowned down at his hand. His hand was still numb and chilly from touching the freezing cold window.

He had a bad feeling about this.

That bad feeling only grew worse.

Every morning, he was awoken by freezing cold air coming through the window. Tommy had grumpily made a pallet on the floor, claiming that he didn't want Tubbo to get sick because then he'd be whiny.

But it was a pallet with one only thin quilt, a worn thing they didn't throw out because Tubbo had been planning to make it into cleaning rags. Tubbo had tried to sneak more blankets onto it, only for Tommy to shove them off in his sleep.

Which Tubbo could deal with! Because other than the sudden change in sleeping habits and no, he definitely wasn't missing cuddling for warmth, it was just a very practical desire to share body heat. Okay, maybe he missed it a little. But despite all of his hints and Tommy calling him Clingybo, the other didn't seem to want to move back to their shared bed. Which, okay, Tubbo could deal with that as long as it made Tommy happy.

Because other than that, Tommy was still very much Tommy. He slept in, he complained about chores, and he laughed just like he always did.

Everyone knew weird things could happen to those who went through Fey claimed areas. Tubbo's own grandmother claimed she could speak to chickens after visiting a haunted farm. Maybe Tommy needed to be a bit colder.

Tubbo clung to that until the day he woke up to close the window and his feet hit sodden carpet.

"Huh?" Tubbo muttered, still half asleep as he looked down. "Did it snow?"

Something sharp and cold slipped into his heart, weighing it down like a stone. Snow was scattered across the floor, forming messy footprints trailing to and from the window.

Tubbo whipped around, afraid of what he would see. "Oh thank God." He whispered, seeing that Tommy was still tangled in his thin quilt, snoring softly.

But Tommy's curls were plastered to his forehead, snowflakes catching the weak morning light. As if someone with snow still clinging to their hands had been combing through his hair, sitting by his friend while Tubbo slept across the room.

No. Nope. Tubbo was not happy with this.

“That’s it.” Tubbo remarked to hopefully empty air, striding forward to slam the window shut. “I’m not letting this continue.”

He let his anger keep him warm as he pulled on his parka and boots, not even bothering to change out of his pajamas. Fey touched was one thing. This was someone trying to steal or hurt his friend and Tubbo was not gonna let that slide. He had been far too optimistic before.

It was time for drastic measures.

“What the hell are you doing?” Tubbo yelled in surprise as his hand was pulled away from the window, scattering crimson paint across the snowy ground.

“Doing something we should have done a while ago.” Tubbo said, pulling his hand out of Tommy’s. Tommy was standing barefoot in the snow in only his pale blue pajamas, glaring at the paintbrush in Tubbo’s hand like it had mortally offended him.

“Stop that.” Tommy said. Tubbo pulled away when Tommy reached forward again.

“Why?” He said, smearing more paint over the windowsill. They should have repainted them a while ago, the crimson red had faded to a dull pink. Once the house was repainted, the Fey would be unable to enter their home, the protective magic strengthening as it was bound into the unmovable wood. At least, Tubbo was pretty sure that’s how it should work.

He frowned at the windowsill. Maybe he should paint the whole house to be sure?

“You’re wasting the paint!”

“Am I?” Tubbo said, looking at Tommy. “I admit, I’ve let this go pretty far! But Tommy, you’re freezing cold all the time, you keep complaining about being hot when you wear jackets or blankets, and this morning, I woke up to snowy footprints on our floor that led *straight to where you slept!* I can’t let this continue!”

Tommy wavered for a moment and Tubbo wondered if he had been a bit too forceful. Then Tommy straightened, a glint in his eyes. “I can’t let you do that.” He said. Tubbo’s heart dropped into his stomach.

He sounded exactly like he did in the blizzard. “Look.” Tubbo said gently, laying the brush down on the windowsill. “I’m not trying to hurt you. Once the windowsills and doorways have been repainted, the Fey can’t get in and we can figure this out together. I need to finish this.”

Please. Please, listen to him, he begged silently.

Tommy stared at Tubbo, his normally vibrant blue eyes dull. “But I need them.” He said. “They aren’t warm. They’re cold. I need it.”

“No, you don’t.” Tubbo pleaded, stepping forward. “Please. Just go back inside and let me finish. I’ll make you hot chocolate again and you can have the rest of the little marshmallows.

All of them.”

For a moment, he thinks he broke through, as Tommy’s shoulders slump.

Tommy’s next words are like shattering ice: “They said I couldn’t trust you.” Tommy turns away, sprinting through the snow.

“No!” Tubbo howls, all instinct. He races after him, chasing him through the snow drifts. But Tommy is pulling ahead, slowly but surely, his longer legs eating up the ground.

Far too many times, Tubbo nearly loses him in the snow, the pale blue blending in. But then he’ll turn the corner and Tommy will be there, still running. His legs were burning by now, the cold air chilling every part of his body but Tubbo refused to stop.

Dimly, Tubbo knows where they are going. Knows how their path traces up through the mountain paths, higher and higher, where the snow never melts.

But he can’t stop chasing the blue of Tommy’s shirt through the snow.

It doesn’t mean he’s ready for what he sees when he finally staggers around a particularly steep snow drift.

““Ello, mate. You’re a stubborn one.”

Hail

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tubbo flinched at the deceptively warm words. If it was anyone else saying them, they'd sound kind and welcoming. But from the king of the Winter Court, it struck a bolt of fear into his heart.

Philza tilted his head to the side, a cold smile on his face as he reclined in his icy throne. He didn't look like the illustrations in Tubbo's books, wasn't draped in jewelry and finery. He even wore a green and white bucket hat instead of a crown! If Tubbo had seen someone with his face on the street, he would have passed him without a second thought.

Despite wearing only thin robes, he looked completely unaffected by the cold. Black feathered wings ruffled behind him, a constant reminder that this wasn't some kind adventurer.

He had straight blond hair and icy blue eyes, almost like-

Focus, Tubbo told himself, searching the room. He'd come for one reason only.

He made a soft wounded noise when he saw Tommy. Tommy was lying slumped against an altar made out of packed snow in the center of the room, his eyes closed. His lips were a pale blue from the chill. If it wasn't for the quick rise and fall of his chest, Tubbo would have thought he was-

"What did you do?" Tubbo said, stepping forward and clenching his fists. That didn't sound good. He wanted to race to Tommy's side and carry him away from this. But something deep inside him told him he wouldn't make it past the snow drift. Philza looked at him, completely unimpressed, but his anger pushed him on. "WHAT DID YOU DO?"

"I reckon you should keep your voice down, your friend could use his nap. Don't want to hurt him, do you?" Tubbo just stared at Philza, fury bubbling just under his skin. This guy was telling him that he could hurt Tommy? Tubbo would never!

And Tommy was already hurt, wasn't he? How could he have missed all the signs that this wasn't some normal side effect of trespassing on Fey grounds? The guilt fizzed and popped in his heart.

"T-this is wrong." Tubbo stuttered, reaching up to hold the red bandana that was tied around his neck. He ached to go to Tommy, to hold his hand and shake him awake. Tommy was never so still, even when sleeping. They had had countless fights after Tommy had elbowed him in the chin and woke him up. "You're hurting him."

Philza chuckled. "Mortals. So sensitive. He's doing just fine. It's impressive how far he's gone. Most don't survive this long. I'm making him better. Stronger."

“Better? You think this is better?” Tubbo said, his voice beginning to rise again. He swallowed back a yell when he saw Tommy twitch, a pained mumble slipping out of the other boy’s mouth. “This isn’t better! What you’re doing, he’s not really Tommy anymore!”

When Tommy had slipped into that trance... Tubbo hadn’t seen a trace of the boy he knew. No enthusiasm, no zest-

No recognition.

“Yeah, mate, that’s the point.” Philza said. He sat up in his throne and Tubbo nearly flinched back. Instead, he planted his feet, trying to hide his fear.

“How can that possibly be the point?”

“Your friend there has a shard of winter in his soul. If he survives his soul freezing over, he’ll be Fey and a member of the Winter Court.” Philza said. There was a cruel delight in his words that made Tubbo sick to his stomach.

Oh.

Oh no.

No nononono- Tubbo couldn’t lose Tommy. Tommy and him were more than friends, they were practically brothers, sworn to stay by each other’s side. Tubbo’s nails dug into his palms as he tried to fight back the tidal wave of panic and grief. What had happened to Tommy when he lost him in that blizzard?

He couldn’t let this man steal away Tommy. He wouldn’t. Tubbo nearly snarled as the man smiled softly at Tommy, wanting to step in front of him so he couldn’t see Tommy anymore. “My youngest son to be exact.”

“What makes you think I’ll let you?” Tubbo snarled.

“What makes you think you can do anything?”

He knew. He knew what they could do to him. He had brought no protection with him but his wits and the red bandanna Tommy had made him. He’d read the stories, heard the rumors about what the Fey could do.

Compared to the might of the Winter Court, Tubbo wasn’t even a mouse or a bee. He was an ant. An ant that would be crushed swiftly and with no remorse.

But he wasn’t going to let Tommy go without a fight. If he was an ant, then he would be the most irritating ant they had ever met.

Tommy was his friend, the person who had always had his back through thick and thin. They had sworn to be blood brothers, always together. Just them against the world.

And Tubbo was not going to let some stupid Winter Court steal Tommy away and make him into some icy Fey.

No matter what it takes.

“Why are you telling me this?” Tubbo changed tactics. Stall. Stall for time. His eyes darted around the room, looking for something that could help him. But other than the throne and the altar, it was empty.

Philza waved a hand. “‘S fun, isn’t it?” He said. His eyes weren’t like Tommy’s, Tubbo realizes. Tommy’s eyes could never be so cruel and cold. “The look on your face when you realize your friend is gone forever. It always makes for the best statues. Maybe I’ll put you in his bedroom as decor.”

“You’re twisted.” Tubbo said. Philza just looked amused. Tubbo was starting to grasp at straws and the Fey king knew it. He wanted to wipe the smug look off of his face. “And what if I don’t want you or that ‘winter shard’ to freeze him over or whatever? What if I don’t want to be a statue? Aren’t there supposed to be deals or something?”

“You say that like you have a choice in the matter, mate.” Philza said. He shifted on his throne. “Why would I offer you a deal? Why would you even want to make one?”

Tubbo spluttered. “Why wouldn’t I?” He said, surprise overcoming rage for a moment. It was Tommy, his best friend. He’d do anything to keep him safe.

“If this succeeds, your friend here would be a member of the Winter Court, a prince.” Philza said. His voice became low, coaxing. “He would be adored as my son and as a younger brother, given anything he could desire. Eternally young, eternally happy. Aren’t you his friend? Shouldn’t you want to see him happy?”

Tubbo did flinch back at that, eyes darting between Tommy and Philza. “I- That is-“ He did want to see Tommy happy. He really did.

They used to trade stories late at night while trying to forget the hunger gnawing at their bellies and the cold nipping away at them through the thin orphanage walls and later in shabby inns. Stories where they’d get adopted by a family that would cherish them.

The Fey couldn’t lie, Tommy would be loved, and the thought of it twisted something inside of Tubbo. Maybe he was selfish, maybe there was something sick and twisted in him, not the Fey. Maybe he wasn’t selfish and this was the right thing to do. He didn’t know.

Tubbo looked at Tommy, taking in his pale skin, the way he didn’t twitch or mumble in his sleep. The boy lying slumped against the altar had none of his friend’s boundless energy. Tommy wasn’t frozen like this.

“Tommy might be happy.” Tubbo said slowly. “But he wouldn’t be Tommy. Not really. And he would never agree to it without your magic making him.”

Philza’s gaze darkened but this time Tubbo matched it, refusing to back down. “I still don’t see why I should offer you a deal.” He said. “If by some miniscule chance you win, I lose my newest child.”

“Because if you don’t, I’ll make sure you never get peace.” Tubbo swore. And this was a promise he’d keep. “I’ll melt my way out of any statue just so I can ruin your day. I’ll claw my way back from whatever torturous fate you assign me to rescue him. Tommy’s my brother, sworn on blood, and that means I get dibs on him and veto powers on anyone trying to adopt him. And guess what? Veto to you.”

Philza cocked his head to the side, oddly bird-like. “Don’t think that’s how that works, mate.” He said. Tubbo was pretty sure that was how it worked. What did Fey know about proper adoption practices anyways? “But I suppose it may make for good entertainment while I wait.”

Somebody shrieked at those words, loud, echoing, and inhuman, and Tubbo nearly jumped out of his skin, glancing around widely. He couldn’t see anything but that didn’t mean no one was there. But he could only see Tommy, his friend still sound asleep.

Philza rolled his eyes, a creepily human gesture. “Quiet.” He said. He turned his gaze back to Tubbo and Tubbo tilted his chin up, wishing he was a bit taller. “This is a very big gesture you’re asking from me. So it will be a very big trial.”

“What are you proposing.” Tubbo said, trying to keep his voice steady. The books said Fey trials had to be achievable. But that didn’t mean it would have to be easy.

“A wager for you,” Philza began. He waved a hand towards Tubbo, a silent question.

“Tubbo.” Tubbo said. He wouldn’t share his true name.

“Tubbo.” Philza said, smiling. He looked weirdly friendly when he smiled at Tubbo like it was just a facade thrown up to appear kind. On anyone else, it may have been nice, but in the here and now? Tubbo was officially creeped out. “Worth a try.”

“Not exactly making me feel very confident in this wager.” Tubbo prompted. Whatever it was though, he could handle it. He would handle it.

“It will require you to go into the realms of each of the leaders here. Each leader holds a charm that is filled with the power of their season. Gain all four, bring them this room, and I shall allow you to leave with your friend.” Philza said. He steepled his fingers together. “Do we have a deal?”

“Not yet.” Tubbo said, folding his arms. There was too much left unsaid. Philza may not be able to lie, but the books said he could dance around the truth. “Will there be a time limit?”

Philza’s smile didn’t waver. “Midnight on the winter solstice.” Tubbo calculated that in his head and cursed. Only two weeks. “That’s when Tommy’s adoption will become permanent.”

Tubbo glared at him. So much for pushing for a longer time limit. “And how do I know you won’t mess with Tommy while I’m gone?” He said. All the books said that Fey could twist your mind until you forget your friends and family and are consumed by what the Fey want you to believe.

The smile dipped for just a moment. He'd struck a nerve. "He will be asleep." Philza said. "Consider it a show of good faith. Until the time limit is up, Tommy will remain asleep and we will not touch his memories."

Tubbo chewed on his bottom lip, considering that. It was likely the best he'd get. He stole another glance at Tommy, frowning as he saw his stillness again. "How will I know that you'll keep your word?"

Philza glared at him. "I give you my oath as King Philza of the Winter Court. Will that suffice?" he answered coolly.

It was a terrible deal honestly. He knew it had to be rigged in one way or another. Leaving it as it was would be risky and stupid and the very thought of leaving it itched at Tubbo.

But he couldn't stand here and negotiate while Tommy was getting slowly changed. Two weeks was not a lot of time to deal with the rest of the Fey Courts. "I accept the wager." Tubbo said, hoping he had made the right choice.

He flinched at the sound of unseen crows cawing, shivering as the room became colder. His breath was fogging in the air now. Philza merely chuckled, "I suggest you hurry then, little human, the clock is already ticking. You don't want your little Tommy to stay here forever."

Tubbo nearly jumped out of his skin, making a soft noise as something cold wrapped around his wrist. He raised it up to eye level.

It was a silver chain bracelet, something he'd seen in jewelry shops during their travels. Hanging from one loop was a deceptively fragile looking snowflake. Tubbo was almost afraid to touch it, worried it might melt away like a real snowflake.

"I'll give you a freebie, mate." Philza said. It'd be almost kind if his voice wasn't laced in condescension. "The winter's charm is already there. Who knows, maybe you'll be able to activate its magic."

"I see." Tubbo said. He tilted his wrist one last time before lowering it. There was probably some sort of trap there but he didn't have the time to uncover it.

"Any last words?" Philza said. "The statue option is still open. It won't hurt. Much."

"I'll be back." Tubbo said, looking at Tommy. He knew the other probably couldn't hear him. But he needed to tell him. "I'll be back and I'll win."

"We'll see." Philza said. Tubbo glared at him one last time before turning and leaving. Every step away from Tommy hurt but he had to do it.

Next time, he swore, next time he would be leaving with Tommy by his side.

Outside the room, night had already fallen. Tubbo watched his breath fog in the chill air. Ignoring the tiredness in his legs, he set off down the winding path.

He had a long trip ahead of him.

Philza watched the little human leave, no warmth in his gaze. What a stupidly brave mortal. He'd enjoy seeing them fail.

There was a soft crackle as ice melted away from beside the throne, revealing an ornate archway. Always one for the dramatics, Philza thought fondly, watching as Wilbur rushed to Tommy's side.

"Father, why would you make such a deal?" Wilbur said, worry leaking through his voice. He settled next to Tommy, pulling the young boy in his lap. Philza smiled at them. It was good to see his family getting along, even if one wasn't quite adopted yet. "What if he wins, and takes Tommy away?"

"Mate, calm yourself." Philza chided. Honestly, he would have thought Wilbur would be the one to catch on first. "Did the boy remind you of anyone?"

Wilbur's brow furrowed as he thought about it. "Not particularly. I didn't care about watching him." He smiled down at Tommy, combing a hand through his blond hair, and leaving streaks of frost behind. Philza rolled his eyes in fond amusement.

"I'd be rather shocked if he escapes the Autumn Court." Philza said. The boy was practically draped in autumnal colors already with his fluffy brown hair and warm colored clothes. Too weak for winter, but someone Schlatt would adore in his kingdom.

Wilbur's worried look slipped away at those words. "Schlatt did mention considering adoption before." He said thoughtfully, a wicked smile growing.

Philza tilted his head, watching his son. He didn't quite understand the friendship his son had with the Autumn Court's king, but it made Wilbur happy so he let it slide. It's not like his sons would ever betray him, as bound to the Court as they were.

"Even if he makes it through Autumn, I doubt he'll make it through Summer and Spring." Techno remarked, stepping up beside the throne. Philza smiled at his oldest son. "Niki has a fondness for small, cute things and he had enough fight in him that he might even draw Dream's attention."

Unsaid was that drawing the attention of one ruler tended to be enough. None escaped the Fey.

Philza chuckled at that thought. "Two mortals, one spell." He said, standing. He walked over to the altar and leaned against it, looking down at his soon to be son. "Either the boy will perish or he'll be adopted into another Court. Either way, he won't be an obstacle for much longer."

"I see now what you mean Father, sorry for doubting you." Wilbur said. He smirked playfully. "Maybe we can set up playdates if he gets adopted. I bet Toms might like that."

Philza waves a hand, reaching over and ruffling Wilbur's soft locks. "I understand your worry mate, you're forgiven. Don't fret you two, Tommy won't be going anywhere." He paused.

“And we’ll leave any playdate planning for later.”

Hm. Would he still have to send the customary yearly truce gift to one of the other Courts if the boy went and got himself adopted into them? Or would the boy count as a gift? Philza chuckled at the thought, waving away his sons’ curious looks.

“He looks a lot like you.” Techno observed. He reached out, resting a hand against Tommy’s forehead, and frowning at the warmth he still found there.

“He does, doesn’t he.” Philza said, tilting his head to the side. He’d been charmed by it when he saw the young boy in the blizzard, his protection magic faltering against winter’s might. And when the boy survived a shard of winter placed in his soul and began to change, Philza had quickly become fond of the resemblance. “It was meant to be.”

“Can I take him to his room?” Wilbur said, practically vibrating in excitement. “I’ve already set it all up.”

“I know, you had me dragging things in and out all day.” Techno said. He easily dodged Wilbur’s swat to his knee.

“Now boys, no fighting.” Philza chided. Techno and Wilbur nodded, looking a bit embarrassed. Goodness, his sons could be a handful at times. “Yes, Wilbur, you may take him to his room. We’ll be playing the waiting game for now.”

After all, what was two weeks to eternity? Philza stepped back, allowing Wilbur to pick up Tommy in a tight hold. The brunet practically skipped out of the room through the archway. Techno lingered, pretending to be interested in the altar.

“Permission to interfere? Or are you playing this the boring way?” He said, his crimson eyes glowing with bloodlust. Philza smiled fondly at him. It was good to see his eldest son in such a good mood.

“Go ahead.” He said, patting Techno’s shoulder. If the little human perished before reaching the next court, it wouldn’t matter much. “Come back in time for dinner, mate.”

“Of course.” Techno said. He slipped out of the room after the path of the mortal. Moments later, howling filled the night air.

Philza shook his head at his son’s rambunctiousness, his wings itching to launch himself in the air and follow after. It had been ages since they’d had a proper family hunt.

“Something to add to the agenda.” He said thoughtfully, turning back towards where Wilbur had gone. Maybe he could make it a welcoming gift for his newest son.

Just two weeks and Tommy would be theirs forever.

Tubbo gets to be feral. As a treat.

Graupel

Chapter Notes

For anyone with a possible related trigger, the human ice statues are briefly described in this chapter! Beginning at “Tubbo turned the corner” and ending at “veto to the Winter Court”

There’s also mentions of violence, exhaustion/injuries, and falling is described.

I hope you enjoy this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

There were more stars than before.

That was the first thing Tubbo noticed when he left the room and plunged into the freezing night. He tilted his head back, taking it all in.

It was absolutely incredible. He thought they had a good view from their isolated cabin but the sky was so full of twinkling stars, the darkness was almost completely crowded out. But the more he searched the sky, the more his awe disintegrated.

He couldn’t find a single familiar constellation in the glittering sky. Not even the ones he and Tommy had made up on nights when neither of them could sleep.

Tubbo frowned, looking back down at the path ahead of him. “Guess that means I’m in the Veil.” He whispered to himself, taking the first few steps down the path. Even the path looked different now, the rough mountain ground replaced by an iced over cobblestone path.

It was... staggering almost. His head was pounding with the strain of it. His mind told him that he had just left an icy cave carved into the snow. But in the corner of his eye, the snow drift flickered and changed, becoming impossibly tall walls. A castle fit for the royal family.

Further down the cliff side, he could see the glints of light where those not of the royal family lived. Buildings that had not existed in the forests he knew. Tubbo swallowed, turning his attention towards the path in front of him.

Maybe it was a little dumb. It was just a little unnerving to have it confirmed that he was officially in the Veil, the world of the Fey. There was so little known that he almost ached with curiosity. Tubbo shook his head. He couldn’t get too wrapped up in it all!

He had a deadline to keep after all. The bracelet felt heavy on his wrist, a constant reminder of what he had to do.

Tubbo picked his way carefully over the cobblestone. He almost preferred the deep snow, at least that gave him some traction. The cobblestones were so icy that he was sliding almost every step and it made progress slow.

His lips twitched into a frustrated smile. He had no doubt they probably did that on purpose. Maybe it was a bad idea to take the path but it was the only route he had. To his left was a steep wall, any cracks hidden by ice so cold that it stuck to his hand. And to his right was a sheer cliff, its bottom hidden by the clouds below. Tubbo's stomach churned and he winced, refusing to look at it again.

The path itself was winding, curving through the mountainside, lit only by moonlight. But at least so far, it was safe.

Tubbo turned the corner and choked on a scream, falling backwards and trying to scramble away.

A person stood in the middle of the path, face still contorted in a scream. Their eyes were wide with fear. Tubbo swallowed heavily as he pushed himself to his feet, trying to calm his racing heart.

The man kind of looked like the village's blacksmith in the town near their cabin with his thick beard and large build. His skin was nearly blue through the layer of ice that covered it. He was wrapped in furs, an empty scabbard wreathed in frost at his hip. His right hand hovered above it like he had been trying to defend himself before the attack.

There was something odd about it though. Tubbo tilted his head to the side. According to their stance, they should have been facing to the left, not forward.

Almost as if someone had moved them.

"Right." Tubbo whispered to himself, his hands shaking a little. He had heard the coldness in Philza's voice when he talked about decor, but being faced with it was an entirely different thing. "Statues. Nearly forgot about that."

He inches closer, half expecting the man to come alive and attack him. Something childish beat in his chest, begging him to turn back and flee from this gruesome sight.

Except fuck that. He was not failing within the first hour of accepting the wager. Tommy deserved his absolute best and Tubbo was going to deliver.

Also, he really hated Philza's stupid, condescending face. The Fey king would be sickeningly smug if he saw Tubbo fleeing from a statue.

Tubbo pressed himself close to the wall, inching past the man and wincing every time he nearly brushed against the statue. God, he hoped the rumors that they were still conscious in there weren't true. It was one thing to read about people being turned into ice statues, it was another to see it.

He speedwalked away from the statue, hoping there wouldn't be another.

Of course his prayers couldn't be answered because God seemed determined to target him specifically. He should go after God after he brings Tommy back home.

Tubbo winced a little. Maybe he was a little hopped up on adrenaline right now.

The next statue was huddled close to the wall, their face turned away. He couldn't make out anything through the ice and frost except for the fact they were taller than him. Tubbo looked away as he hurried past.

He had to get Tommy out, Tubbo thought fiercely. The conversation earlier had shaken him slightly but this solidified it. Tommy was kind, he'd never turn anyone into a statue. As a joke maybe, but these weren't jokes. These were horrifying.

As he had said earlier, veto to the Winter Court.

At least the statues were the only obstacle. The only thing that made them an issue was his own fear at seeing them.

Right as Tubbo thought that, howls rang out behind him. He stiffened, nearly stumbling to the stop as he registered the sound.

Wolves.

Tubbo broke out into a sprint, skidding and stumbling over the cobblestones.

God, how could he be so stupid? He should have said they couldn't attack him but he'd been so preoccupied by the sight of Tommy... Tubbo swore, nearly falling as he skidded around a corner.

More howls. Closer this time.

He searched the path ahead of him, heart beating fast as a rabbit. He didn't have a weapon to fight, or a convenient tree to climb.

But he couldn't die. Not like this. Not after swearing he would save Tommy. Tubbo gritted his teeth, drawing on the last dregs of his strength to run faster. If he died here, then Tommy would be at the mercy of the Winter Court. They'd adopt him and destroy the bright, cheerful boy he knew.

He couldn't let that happen.

Tubbo just didn't know how he'd fix this.

"At least I won't have to walk the dogs for a few days." The voice was almost light, echoing down the path. "Or feed them."

Tubbo bit back a swear. He couldn't yell, not now. His chest was already aching as he ran, a stitch beginning to form in his side.

They're mocking you, a little voice whispered. They could have run you down in moments. They want to see you scared.

He wouldn't give that to them. They didn't deserve his fear.

"I'm glad you took this option." The voice continues. "Wilbur wasn't, but I really prefer a hunt. The terror, the prey trying to get away... It's more fun than just icing someone over. Even better when they're some cocky brat who thinks they can steal from my family."

Tubbo would roll his eyes if he wasn't certain that'd send him straight off the cliff. He was just so glad he could be this psycho's entertainment. And he couldn't steal Tommy if Tommy had been stolen from him first!

The clicking of claws against ice was getting closer now. Tubbo continued his desperate search for anything that could help, but there was nothing but the cobblestone path before him.

And then, horrifyingly, there was something. Or rather, nothing.

A wide ravine, cutting straight through the path. Tubbo choked, skidding to a stop and watching as gravel tumbled into the abyss. He was cornered.

They absolutely did this on purpose.

"This is my favorite part." The voice said, amusement cutting through the monotone. Tubbo turned around, clenching his fists as he considered his options. There weren't a lot. "When they realize there's nowhere else to run."

The wolves appeared first, prowling around the corner. They were massive, coming up to Tubbo's shoulder. Their fanged mouths dripped saliva, glowing red eyes focused on him. "Nice doggies?" Tubbo tried. The lead wolf snarled, snapping at the air.

Definitely not nice then.

Right. What did he know about wolves? Pretty much nothing, he had to admit. Numerous stories had described the wolves of the Winter Court but none actually agreed on what they were. Some claimed they were normal wolves, trained and raised by Technoblade. Others, more religious, claimed they were hellhounds.

His least favorite were the ones who claimed they were humans first. Those who had earned the respect of the Blood God and had been changed into immortal wolves under his command. Whether they were willing or not.

All said that once the wolves caught up to you, there was no escape.

Tubbo's heart did a funny little swooping thing when Technoblade himself stepped around the corner.

The Fae was in his more boar-like form, blood already dripping from the axe he held in his hands. Tubbo straightens, not wanting to show that he was shaking slightly.

“You know, I never thought I could cause this.” Tubbo muttered to himself. Maybe it was the adrenaline high but man, he was riding a bit high right now. Could he fight Techno? Probably not, but he was tempted to try.

No. Bad Tubbo. He had to be smart here. What did he know about Technoblade?

“Cause what?” Techno said. He prowled closer, the wolves parting to let him past. “Be quick about it, Wilbur’s probably going to want me to rearrange the kid’s room for the nth time.”

A stab of rage hit Tubbo at the mention of his friend. And by the way Techno grinned, feral and possessive, he knew it.

Wait.

Rage. That gave him an idea.

Tubbo grinned ferally, the kind of grin that made Tommy proud and a little scared. “I’ve got the great Technoblade scared of me.”

“Scared.” Techno said blandly. He fixed Tubbo with a look that dropped with condescension. “Bruh. You think I, the Blood God and prince of the Winter Court, am scared of a tiny mortal. Whose one claim to fame is that *my* newest brother used to like him.”

“Uh, yeah, that’s what I said.” Tubbo said, pushing down his own rage at the wording. He gestured, taking the moment to quickly survey the ravine behind him. The sides were less sheer than he thought, more of a steep hill than a cliff. “I mean, your Dad sent me out on a super difficult quest and yet here you are, trying to hunt me down before I even start. Scaredy cat. Scaredy cat Techno.”

Play it up. Play up the cockiness and the lack of fear. Techno was smart, Tubbo had read the stories. He knew the only chance he had was if Techno got too annoyed to actually use that big brain of his.

Tommy might be the annoying friend of their duo, but by God, Tubbo could make a play for that title whenever he wanted.

“What can I say, I’m a bit more hands on. Don’t feel like waiting two weeks while you stumble around on an impossible quest” Techno said, hefting his axe higher. His crimson eyes were starting to glow. “The voices demand blood for your crimes.”

“I just call them like I see them, you really don’t have to get so defensive.” Tubbo said, raising his hands. He had an idea, but it was gonna suck. “I’m sure plenty of people are more scared of you than you are of them.”

“That’s it.” Techno huffed. Tubbo inched back, hearing more gravel clatter down into the ravine. “I’m done with this. I’m going to turn the snow crimson with your blood and leave with the knowledge you can never try to steal my little brother again.”

“Really? Me too. I actually think I kind of want to go.” Tubbo said, ignoring the way his voice cracked a little. The reuniting with Tommy part would just have to wait a little. Techno

stared at him for a moment, actually baffled.

“Unless you got wings, you ain’t getting out of this alive.” Techno growled. The wolves growled, tensing as he stepped forward again.

Tubbo grinned at Techno. “Ah, you’re assuming I want to go up. But I want to go down.”

And then he turned and jumped.

The ravine was too wide for him to make it safely to the other side in one jump. He knew this but the moment of free fall was still terrifying. Tubbo wheezed as he crashed into a thin ledge twenty feet below the rim, scrambling to dig his fingers into the cracks in the stone.

For a moment, he hung there and let himself breathe through the pain in his chest. He might have cracked a rib with that stunt. Just a little.

Tubbo hummed, looking down. He was closer to the clouds now.

“Heeeeh? What the fuck are you doing?” Tubbo looked up. Techno’s crimson eyes seemed to glow in the darkness. “I’m just going to be waiting for you on the other side of the ravine when you climb back up.”

“Eh, you know, you guys put me on a bit of a time crunch. I’m not letting you take my brother-“ There was a guttural growl at that. Stupid Fey thinking they could take his brother.

“My-“

He interrupted Techno’s rebuttal. “So, I think I’ll take a faster way down.”

It was only barely possible because he noticed the ravine’s walls were slanted and not sheer. He wouldn’t freefall if he’d slip, he’d skid. But that didn’t mean that his heart wasn’t currently beating like a hammer against his ribs. Just because he was sliding, not falling, didn’t mean it wouldn’t hurt if he missed a ledge and plummeted to the bottom.

If Tommy had attempted a stunt like this, Tubbo would have pushed him into a pond. He smiled at the irony.

Tubbo let himself fall again, half skid and half free fall, until he reached a ledge five feet below. This time he really did yelp, feeling his aching shoulders nearly get ripped out of their sockets as he grabbed the ledge.

He had to- He had to do this. He couldn’t return to the path, there was no way Techno would let him leave the mountain alive. Not with the threat he posed to them trying to adopt Tommy.

Tubbo knew that he could do this. He was strong and had the best stamina in their duo. He’d seen mountain goats do this all the time and he was much cooler than a goat.

Despite his expert reasoning, a strangled noise of pain slipped out of him when he dropped again, catching himself on another ledge.

He pressed his head into the cool stone, breathing hard.

“It’d be easier if you let me kill you.” Techno’s voice drifted down. Tubbo rolled his eyes. “You’re not winning this wager anyways. We won’t let you take him away.”

“In the words of someone who I love very dearly and who is my brother, not yours.” Tubbo took a deep breath. “FUCK OFF.”

And then he let himself fall again, beginning the painstaking process of sliding and catching himself on whatever he could find.

Finally, finally, he felt himself hit solid ground. Tubbo sunk down, too tired to even cry. His arms felt like there were on fire and legs weren’t much better. Halfway down, it had started to get harder to breath and he had to take it slower.

But he had to get up. Tubbo pushed off the ground, letting out a strangled cry at the throbbing in his limbs. It didn’t matter. He wasn’t out of the stupid winter area yet. He had to get up. For Tommy.

He staggered to his feet, leaning against the wall for support. One step. Two steps. Each step felt like agony, fresh pain searing through him.

His right knee buckled underneath him, and Tubbo wheezed as he slid face first down a gravel hill. He laid there for a moment, trying to catch his breath. Darkness seeped around the edges of his vision.

He couldn’t. He couldn’t fail here. Tubbo tried to push himself up, but his arms buckled. He gritted his teeth and tried again. They refused to work.

No. No, he was not going to fail Tommy! He wasn’t going to lose his friend like this. Tubbo feebly clawed at the gravel below him, trying to get his arms to work, to get the darkness to go away.

A crunch. Tubbo froze, biting his lip and trying to stay quiet.

“Hello?” A shadow fell over him. “Oh. Oh dear. Are you okay?”

“Go away.” Tubbo snarled. He didn’t want to deal with any annoying Fey right now. He wanted to struggle in peace.

“I don’t think I should.” They said. Tubbo swatted at where he thought the person was. Okay, it was really more of an uncoordinated flail. But he was not going to be taken without a fight. Anyone who lived nearby was bound to be a member of the Winter Court who’d turn him into Technoblade without blinking an eye. “You’re kind of not in the best of shape right now, and there’s a Hunt going on. I’m not leaving you here to that.”

Arms slid under him and Tubbo made a strangled noise as he was picked up, going limp for a moment as his vision fuzzed.

“-Purpled’s gonna wanna hear about this.” The person remarked, their voice coming back into focus. Tubbo blinked slowly, mind still fuzzy with pain. He couldn’t really see who was carrying him. “Take a break, I’m not going to hurt you.”

“I don’t have to listen to you.” Tubbo said stubbornly.

And then he passed out.

He was not imprisoned when he woke up. Or dead. In fact, he felt really good, the pain in his body having disappeared.

His eyes narrowed. Suspicious.

Tubbo sat up, pushing the blankets off and looking around. His formerly shredded sweater had been mended. He traced his fingers over the front, unable to find the seams. Weird.

He was lying on a plush couch in what appeared to be someone’s living room. A fire was crackling in a brick fireplace across the room, filling the room with warm light. Mugs of half finished tea sat on the coffee table in front of him.

He felt a pain in his heart, making him pull the blanket higher. It looked like something he and Tommy would have done, on a quiet evening when neither had chores to tend to. He missed home so much it hurt. Was their cabin alright? Was Tommy alright?

...He missed Tommy so much it hurt. This was the longest they had been separated in nearly a decade.

“Hey.” A new voice said. Tubbo stiffened, looking up. “You’ve got quite the buzz around you.”

He wasn’t alone here.

Chapter End Notes

What Tubbo did is not Recommended for those who don’t live in fantasy worlds with slightly odd laws of nature.

And for those who don’t live in snowy areas, Graupel is known as soft hail or snow pellets. It’s pretty interesting!

Flurry

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tubbo scrambled to his feet, nearly knocking the coffee table over. “Who are you?” He said, heart beginning to speed up as he turned around. “Where am I?”

He froze, another question jumping to the forefront of his mind. Oh god. Oh no. “How long have I been asleep?” All of his injuries, the scrapes, the bruises, even the deep searing pain in his muscles, had disappeared.

How much time had he lost with his stupid plan? How long had Tommy spent defenseless in the clutches of the Winter Court?

“Like, a few hours. Chill.”

“How can you say that?” Tubbo hissed, gesturing wildly. He took in the person in front of him, still caught between fight or flight.

He was expecting another inhuman Fey, someone cold and cruel. Their appearance timeless and unmarred in a way that mortal people could never match.

Or even worse, the prince he had not met, Wilbur.

But the person standing in front of him looked to be his age despite the few inches they had on him. They had soft looking blond hair and tan skin that even had a few freckles. He could see small scars littering their hands, similar to the ones on Tubbo’s from cooking or various misadventures.

Unlike the king or Technoblade who hadn’t seemed to notice the cold, the teenager in front of him was wearing a thick purple hoodie.

...still a bit odd considering that with the fire, the room was quite warm. Tubbo frowned, rocking on his heels.

The only thing that really marked him as not quite human was the boy’s violet eyes. Their eyes almost shimmered in the firelight, not the same eerie glint that was in Tommy’s eyes, but Tubbo’s stomach still lurched.

He didn’t... he didn’t look like one of the Fey. But Tubbo couldn’t relax completely. Was this another trap? Some kind of cruel game?

“I can say it pretty easily. You done checking me out?” The other teenager remarked. They slipped their hands into their pockets, completely unconcerned despite Tubbo’s stare.

“Are you a Fey?” Tubbo asked bluntly. No point in beating around the bush and playing stupid word games. He was tired of word games right now.

Tommy would laugh if he heard Tubbo say that. It had always been Tubbo who loved word games and Tommy who would protest their very existence.

He was very tired.

Tubbo could see a doorway behind the teenager, its room hidden in shadows. He'd bolt if he had to. Years on the road had made him fast.

"No." The teenager said. He rolled his eyes at Tubbo's disbelieving look. "The hoodie I'm wearing is green. The fire is blue. See? I can lie. Not a Fey. And not wanting to deal with some paranoid bullshit while you wrap your head around that."

Tubbo glanced at the fire, earning a soft snort. His mind felt like it was racing a mile a minute. Was there a way for the other to dance around the truth? Could his hoodie have an inner lining, or the fire refer to another flame?

Ugh. His head hurt just thinking about it.

"Or be paranoid." The teenager said, tilting his head to the side. "Honestly, a much better choice. Probably good survival instincts considering where you are."

That was true. Tubbo took a deep breath, steeling himself. He could handle this in a calm and rational manner. If this was one of the Fey, as satisfying as it would feel, punching them after skidding down a cliff would likely get him killed.

That didn't erase the lingering temptation though.

Slowly, Tubbo lowered his hands, trying to ignore how they were shaking. "Who are you then?" He asked. "Why did you help me?"

Even if they weren't Fey, that didn't mean they were completely trustworthy. Tubbo had seen humans do terrible things. And they were in the Veil where the Fey left their Mark on everything. There was no guarantee this 'kind stranger' wasn't allied with a Court.

He could only trust Tommy in this world and in the Veil.

The teenager shrugged. "I'm Purpled. This is my cabin." He said. "I didn't bring you here, that was Ranboo. I was just chilling in my room and he shows up holding a person who looks like they fell off a cliff and asks for help."

...that was pretty close to what happened. "I didn't fall off a cliff." Tubbo said, looking at the wall. The wood whorls were very pretty.

"Uh-huh."

"I skidded. Slid, maybe. The walls were slanted. I would have been fine."

"Sure." Purpled said. "The three potions we poured down your throat just disappeared into an invisible sponge. Your sweater got into a fight with an invisible tiger."

“Those exist?” Tubbo said, eyes widening. He had told Tommy they existed as a joke! Tigers were a myth made up by traders to sell shirts! Everyone knew that!

“No.” Purpled said.

Tubbo breathed a sigh of relief.

“Of course, I could be lying.”

“You’re a jerk.” Tubbo mumbled, slumping a bit. Purpled just tilted his head, an air of ‘what are you going to do about it’ around him. Tubbo eyed him but couldn’t find a hint as to whether the boy was joking or telling the truth. He had never heard anything about someone named Purpled.

“Ranboo?” Tubbo asked, changing the subject. The name didn’t sound familiar at all, no matter how much he wracked his brain. There were no stories or rumors about someone named Ranboo either.

“My roommate.” Purpled said. He stepped closer and Tubbo stiffened, ready for an attack. Instead the other swiped one of the mugs off of the coffee table, taking a sip out of it. “He saw you lying on the ground and decided to drag you home. He’s out right now to get more brewing supplies so I can replace the potions we had to use on you.”

Brewing- oh. Oh. “You’re a witch.” Tubbo said as it dawned on him.

It explained the eyes at least. Witches were Fey marked people that had developed magic of their own without becoming fully Fey. The odd changes led to odder features like strange colored eyes. Said magic wasn’t really useful for more than brewing potions or the occasional tiny glamour, but it was still incredibly rare.

Most witches had been hunted for their powers, either to be killed or turned into slaves. Tubbo felt a few more pieces click into the puzzle in his mind but he still kept his guard up. There’s no telling what kind of deal Purpled could have made in exchange for safety in the Veil.

Purpled stiffened for a moment before relaxing. “Just shout it out, why don’t you.” He muttered into his cup. Tubbo winced, feeling a bit guilty despite his better judgement.

“Sorry.” He said, combing a hand through his hair. Gravel fell out, clattering against the floor, making Tubbo wince. But Purpled’s tense expression seemed to ease a little at the sound. “Long day, no filter right now.”

“It’s cool.” Purpled said. He took another sip of his drink before continuing. “I know it’s kind of a rare thing. There’s not a lot of us around.”

Tubbo nodded, not quite sure what else to say. But Purpled continued. “But since you’re here, I’m gonna need some kind of payment for my help. It took a lot of potions to heal you.”

Tubbo frowned. “That seems unfair.” He said. He appreciated the help but still. “I wasn’t exactly awake to agree to any of that.”

“Well, yeah, the bulk of that is Ranboo’s debt.” Purpled said drily. “Seeing as he’s the one to drag you in and ask for the potions.”

Tubbo tilted his head, his forehead wrinkling in confusion. “That seems a bit cruel to make your roommate pay you back.” He said. As much as he and Tommy had joked about debts, neither had actually cared.

“It’s sensible.” Purpled insisted. “Do you know how much work goes into potions? I need to get paid back somehow.”

“Still.” Tubbo said. Don’t they live together? Wouldn’t it get paid back eventually? Purpled rolled his eyes, waving a hand.

“Unfortunately, currency isn’t really a thing here.” Purpled said, looking disappointed at that fact. “But you should get used to collecting on debts, no matter who the other person is. And paying up.”

“I’m not against collecting on debts.” Tubbo said firmly. If he had any right now, he’d be pulling every string he had to get Tommy back.

“Good, you’ll need that.” Purpled said firmly. “Besides, Ranboo will pay me back. We’ve got an arrangement. But that debt and arrangement doesn’t cover the fact that I’ve very kindly allowed you to stay in my house.”

Tubbo was ninety percent sure Purpled couldn’t make him pay. But was it worth fighting it? Witches could brew potions of harming just as easily as healing, and if Ranboo came back, it would be two against one.

“I don’t exactly have anything to pay you back with either.” Tubbo said, fidgeting a little. All he had were some trinkets left in his pockets. He rarely carried much unless they were traveling to a town.

But payment in the Fey realm could be... steep. In fact, a lot of stories revolved around trying to pay back a debt.

“Don’t look at me with those sad eyes.” Purpled mumbled, glancing away. “I’m not gonna ask for your firstborn or anything, I don’t even like babies. Do you know how much money it costs to raise one? And how the hell would you work out the conversion rate on the market anyways? I just want news on what’s going on.”

“News?” Tubbo echoed, setting aside Purpled’s mini rant on the monetary value of his nonexistent firstborn. He didn’t have much of that outside of stories he’d pick up. He and Tommy had kept to themselves and the town they visited was too isolated to get any fresh news. “I mean, I visited another town recently, but I don’t exactly travel much.”

“Not about the human world.” Purpled said. He set his mug back down. “That’s boring. I doubt you know anything I would want there. I meant news about the Winter Court. Ranboo said there’s been a lot of activity since the last full moon. Then he heard wolves howling last

night, our iron horseshoe fell off the door, and our windows were frosted over this morning. So, we're also looking at a Hunt."

"A Hunt?"

"When someone escapes a court or something interesting appears in the Veil, be it human or a creature, one of the royals can call for a Hunt. The Fey way of saying the new entertainment for any member of the Court is hunting it down." Purpled said, bitterness lacing his words like poison. "Of course, the royal family gets execution rights. They'll keep pursuing the prey until the Hunt is called off or until it's dead."

Tubbo winced, rage beginning to kindle in his heart again at what Purpled said. He didn't know if the moon cycles were different in the Veil, but their last full moon was just after the blizzard. How long had the Fey been planning to take his friend?

And then they had the audacity to try and mark Tubbo as prey? He shivered a little at the memory of Technoblade's eyes.

Was the Fey prince still hunting him?

He swallowed hard, remembering Technoblade stalking closer. If he hadn't jumped, he'd be dead now. No one to protect Tommy. That horrifying memory likely wouldn't be the last.

"Which seems pretty coincidental considering just an hour later. Ranboo brings back a heavily injured person from Winter territory." Purpled said. His eyes were sharper now, the glow more intense.

Tubbo straightened up, his rage still simmering inside his heart. He was going to punch at least one of the royal family in the face, he vowed. Was it the best plan? Probably not. Was it just after saving Tommy on Tubbo's priority list? Absolutely.

"They kidnapped my friend, claiming to be adopting him." Tubbo said. The words felt like ashes in his mouth. "I took a deal to try and free him."

And he'd already messed up, hadn't he, a little voice whispered in the back of his mind. Within the first few hours, he had slid down a steep hill trying to flee from the Fey and ended up unconscious. If it hadn't been for Ranboo's kindness and Purpled's potions, he'd probably still be lying on the ground there, absolutely defenseless.

His shoulders started to slump again as he looked down on the ground. His rage was like a flickering candle now, just as quick to go out as it was to light. How was he going to make it to the other Courts, let alone travel back up the mountain, if he couldn't even fight one member of the Winter Court?

Tubbo was knocked out of his dark thoughts by a hand landing on his shoulder. He looked up into serious violet eyes. "None of that." Purpled said, grimacing. "Don't cry in my living room. It's just awkward."

“I can’t postpone my mental breakdown. It’s been overdue by a month. I’m behind schedule, production has backed up.” Tubbo mumbled, his eyes burning. He reached up, rubbing at them with one hand. He’d always been a bit of a crybaby. Tommy had teased him about it.

That thought made his eyes burn more.

God, he wished he was home with Tommy right now. Then he could have screamed, and raged, and cried. And they would have thrown snowballs at trees and each other while Tommy teased him about his blotchy face.

Instead he had to keep shoving the emotions further and further down until he felt like a glass pane ready to shatter.

Later. He told himself. Later would have Tommy, and snowballs, and maybe even hot chocolate with marshmallows.

“Well, try, I guess.” Purpled said, moving his hand away. It hovered awkwardly for a moment before slipping back into his hoodie pocket. “Because I’m really bad at comforting people and Ranboo’s not supposed to be back for a while. It’s gonna be messy and I can’t exactly go find him to deal with the mess I’ll make. I’m not getting paid enough to deal with this.”

“I’ll try.” Tubbo said, closing his eyes until the burning faded slightly. He didn’t have time for tears right now. He looked up at Purpled, trying to find a distraction. “Why can’t you go find him? Is he far away or something?”

Purpled frowned. “Nah, I always know where he’s at. Can’t get to him though so that knowledge isn’t really useful.”

“Is it some sort of witch thing?” Tubbo asked. He hadn’t heard anything about that.

“You’re kind of nosy, aren’t you?” Purpled said. Tubbo shrugged. It had served him well. Purpled slumped back into the armchair next to the couch. “It’s my own deal. I’m bound to this house. If I leave, I forfeit the deal. And that’s all I’m gonna tell you about it.”

“Oh.” Tubbo said. He hadn’t exactly been expecting that. Tubbo chewed on his bottom lip, turning that new knowledge over and over in his mind. Purpled could be lying for sympathy or to trick him, but the tired frustration on the other’s face looked pretty real. “Sorry for bringing it up.”

“It’s no big deal.” Purpled said with a shrug. His voice gave him away, slow and quiet like he had to force out each word. “Kind of a pain in the ass sometimes but Ranboo can collect the stuff we need and I can hold down the fort here. But getting news can be kind of difficult. Ranboo does his best, but he’s got his own stuff to deal with.”

“Makes sense.” Tubbo said. Something inside of him told him to keep prying but he shoved it down. It felt a little bit wrong to treat Purpled like a book, a puzzle to solve. If the knowledge would save Tommy, Tubbo would question him until everything was laid bare. This story felt a bit too personal though, and not useful to his quest at all. But, oh, how he wanted to know everything. “Does Ranboo also have...?”

“You can ask him that.” Purpled said, his violet eyes flinty. “It’s up to him to share. What’s your deal anyways? What worried the royal family enough to start a Hunt with you as the target? No offense, but you don’t exactly look like a brave warrior.”

Tubbo flinched, hand going to the bracelet around his wrist. “No offense taken, I guess. The terms of my deal and my debt is paid?”

It was a risky deal but it was riskier still to let a debt go unpaid. He was sure he could wriggle his way out of it, given enough time, but it would take time that was desperately needed right now.

Purpled nodded. “Yep. Just tell me the terms and I’ll consider it paid.”

There was none of the icy tingle of his first deal. Instead, the sharp smell of ozone filled the air as if heralding an impending storm. Tubbo flinched anyway, eyeing Purpled warily as the other pretended not to notice.

“Fine. The deal is that I have to collect a charm from each Fey Court leader.” Tubbo said. He kept silent on the second question, not trusting himself to not start swearing again at the Winter Court’s bending of their deal.

Purpled’s eyes widened before the astonishment was quickly wiped away again. “Glad I wasn’t drinking anything during that.” He said. He drummed his heels on the ground, looking at the bracelet. Tubbo shifted his hand to cover it again, ignoring the boy’s eye roll. Purpled seemed nice, but he still wasn’t certain that this wasn’t a trap. “Each Fey Court?”

“Each.” Tubbo confirmed. Philza had been clear on those terms.

“So less worried, and more just trying to bury you and get it over with.” Purpled said, thoughtfully. “I mean, that deal? Near impossible. You got scammed.”

“It’s possible.” Tubbo said firmly, tilting his chin up. Tubbo scammed people, he didn’t get scammed. “I can do it, Hunt or no Hunt.”

Purpled paused for a moment, the crackling of the fireplace filling the silence. “And your friend is worth this?” He asked, his voice a bit softer. “This isn’t some adventure tale. You’ll be facing three Fey leaders and a Hunt led by the Winter Court. You’ll need a miracle to escape from one, let alone three. Add in the Hunt and your fate is sealed. Is your friend worth all this?”

“Yes.” Tubbo said firmly. Tommy was worth all that and more. He knew Tommy would do the same as him if Tubbo was in his shoes. He flashed a weak grin at Purpled. “Like you said, you’d need a miracle to escape a Court. I’m gonna be Tommy’s miracle.”

“Well, at least you’ve got the no fear bit down.” Purpled said. He sighed, running a hand through his hair. “And considering my circumstances, I doubt I have much room to call you an idiot. Not that I don’t think you’re an idiot, but it’s hard coming up with a successful argument.”

“You couldn’t talk me out of it anyways.” Tubbo said, his shoulders curling in a bit. “I’m doing this and I’m gonna rescue Tommy.”

There was no other outcome he was willing to consider. It didn’t matter what the Courts threw at him. He’d save Tommy.

“Right.” Purpled said, settling back into his chair. “Unfortunately, neither me nor Ranboo can help you with that. I mean, we healed you up, but the Courts? Nu-uh. I’d bankrupt you with the price of visiting one Court if it wasn’t for my deal. And Ranboo’s soft, but even he knows the danger.”

“That’s alright.” Tubbo said, waving a hand. He expected that. It was honestly a lot that they had healed him up in exchange for information on the Winter Court. The lingering paranoia would have been difficult to get past too. “I’ll have to leave soon then.”

Purpled eyed him with barely concealed interest. “It’s kind of like kicking a puppy when I say how dumb you are.” He said. Tubbo rolled his eyes.

“I’m not a puppy or dumb.” He insisted. Tommy was the one with the puppy dog eyes not him. Tubbo only used his if absolutely necessary. And right now, he had everything handled perfectly. “It isn’t a big deal.”

“You kinda are like a sad puppy.” Purpled said, ignoring what he said. He was drumming his heels again. The sound reminded Tubbo of Tommy, making his heart ache a little bit. “I mean, you’ve got this sad and lonely vibe to you which explains why Ranboo found you. Dude’s like a magnet for that. And you’re dumb because I’m betting you didn’t secure a way back to the Winter Court.”

Tubbo stiffened a bit, looking at Purpled. “Can’t I just travel back?” He asked suspiciously. He had a compass with him and the mountain itself wasn’t inconspicuous. None of the stories had mentioned losing an entire mountain.

“Maybe.” Purpled said. He shrugged at Tubbo’s glare. “Compasses don’t work in the Veil. Normally there are paths through the wild areas that you can use, but I wouldn’t be surprised if Philza closes them off to you. It’ll be pretty difficult getting back.”

“You can’t expect me to believe that.” Tubbo said. Purpled shrugged, waving a hand at the doorway behind him.

“You can go and check.” He said. “But even if I’m lying, you were unconscious when Ranboo brought you here. I doubt you’d know the direction anyways which makes the path point moot.”

Tubbo frowned at Purpled, turning and walking out the door into some sort of kitchen area. He beelined straight for the large window. No matter how he angled his head, he couldn’t see the familiar mountain that marked the Winter Court’s kingdom.

Nothing but snowy pine trees as far as he could see.

He retraced his steps, passing the entrance to the room to try a window on the opposite side of the house. No mountain. Tubbo growled in frustration, whirling and stomping back to where Purpled was waiting.

Tubbo let out a filthy string of curses, flopping back down on the couch, no longer grateful for their help. Okay, maybe he was still a bit grateful. But he wasn't acknowledging that right now.

Either Purpled was lying or Philza really did close the paths. He ignored Purpled's faint snort, glaring at the wall like he could see Philza's smug face now. "Guess I am a moron." He said bitterly, not hinting as to which he believed.

He should have stayed and negotiated longer. But the thought of losing an entire mountain hadn't crossed his mind. Of course the Winter Court would use every resource at their disposal! Of course there was the chance he'd travel too far to be able to see where the mountain was!

Purpled had him over a barrel and the other knew it. Either the Winter Court was truly closing the paths or Purpled wouldn't give him directions. He couldn't afford a delay like this.

"You are." Purpled interrupted his thoughts. "But luckily you may have stumbled upon the one person who can dig you out of the hole you dug for yourself. Congratulations."

"You can?" Tubbo said, looking up. His eyes narrowed. Convenient. And suspicious. Purpled regarded him steadily, giving nothing away. "For a price I'm guessing."

"Of course. Gotta make it worth my while, you know?" Purpled said. He tilted his head to the side, his violet eyes gleaming in the firelight. "So let's talk business."

Chapter End Notes

Eyyyy, it's Purpled time! I was pretty excited to write this chapter, they have a fun dynamic. Tubbo's doing his best but, well, he lost the mountain.

Please leave kudos, bookmark, or review if you enjoyed! I love seeing the reviews you guys write.

Powder Snow

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“In return for getting to examine the charm already on your bracelet, I will craft you a way back to your friend.” Purpled continued.

Tubbo’s hand went back to his bracelet, alarm bells ringing in his mind. “Why do you want to see it?” He challenged. Purpled could do anything with it if Tubbo gave it to him. If the winter charm was stolen from him, he’d waste precious time trying to get it back.

Purpled waves a hand. “Because it’s obviously an artifact of immense magical power?” He said, like Tubbo was the idiot for not thinking about it. Tubbo frowned at him. “There’s not exactly instruction manuals for witches. Whatever I learn, I’ve got to claw together from examining whatever I can get my hands on. But artifacts aren’t exactly easy to find and the price can be steep.”

Tubbo eyed him, anxiety churning in his gut. It sounded true. But he knew nothing of how witches worked other than scraps and conjecture. It was an incredibly suspicious deal but also a plausible one.

A little voice in his head wondered if Purpled was lying to him, if he had set up the location problem so Tubbo would consider the deal.

But the location problem was a catch-22. If he chose not to believe Purpled and it was real, he’d get lost in the Veil. Tubbo chewed on his bottom lip, turning it over and over in his head. Could he risk losing his way in the Veil?

He had two choices. Either he believed Purpled, or he didn’t. The question was which choice wouldn’t impede his quest.

“You’ll have to swear that you will not attempt to take it from me or convince others to do so.” Tubbo said, his voice steely. “And that this isn’t a trap set by the Fey.”

“Fine.” Purpled said with a shrug. “As valuable as that little charm is, I don’t really have much use for it other than briefly examining it. I’m kinda stuck in a cabin, not a lot of social or mercenary life here.”

“You could get Ranboo to do it.” Tubbo challenged, crossing his arms. Not to mention any possible Fey backers.

Purpled rolled his eyes. “Ranboo would fold like a house of cards in a windstorm the moment you demanded it back.” He said, rolling his eyes, but there was a hint of fondness to his words. “He’s not cut out for the mercenary life.”

“Then it should be easy for you to promise.” Tubbo said. It didn’t quite ease his anxiety, but it might make it a bit easier to bear.

“I swear that I will not attempt to take Tubbo’s charm or bracelet, nor will I convince others to do so.” Purpled recited. Tubbo shivered as the smell of ozone filled the air, disappearing as quickly as it came. It was different from Philza’s promise, maybe because Purpled was a witch and the other was a Fey king, but it still sent a shiver up his spine.

“Okay.” Tubbo said to himself. He looked back up at Purpled. “And what do I get out of this deal?”

“I can enchant an item you have.” Purpled said. “It’ll need to be something connected to your friend, preferably something with memories and emotions connecting the both of you. As long as you have it, it’ll show you the way back to your friend. Hopefully that should be enough to guide you through the Winter Court’s kingdom again.”

“You don’t sound too sure.” Tubbo said. He began to pace, letting the rhythm guide his thoughts. He had to stay focused but his restless energy felt like it was burning him up inside.

“I reverse engineered it from a minute of examining a toy used for Fey hunters.” Purpled said drily. “And the most I’ve used it for is enchanting a book for Ranboo so he can find his way back when he goes out for news and supplies. Unfortunately, I can’t give you a guarantee. All I can give you is that it should work.”

Tubbo paused, staring at the wooden planks beneath his feet as he thought it over. It wasn’t that he couldn’t accept the degree of risk. It was the trust part he was struggling with. He barely knew Purpled. Could he trust him?

Could he risk losing Tommy?

For Tommy, anything.

In for a penny, in for a pound. “It has to be something with value?”

“Yup.” Purpled said, popping the p. “The memories give the magic strength and a target to latch onto for the locator portion of the spell..”

Tubbo’s hand automatically went to his bandanna before slowly dropping again. He couldn’t use it. If the royal family figured out he had something like what Purpled described, they’d destroy it. He couldn’t risk losing it.

He searched his pockets, grinning when he pulled out his old compass. Tommy and him had a matching set of compasses, a last gift from the orphanage caretaker when they became too old to stay. Tommy and him carried it everywhere they went.

He wondered if Tommy still had it. Or even this was lost, tossed to the side by the Winter Court or left on the table at home like it meant nothing.

Focus. Tubbo took a deep shuddering breath, trying to calm his racing thoughts. The needle was frozen, not moving when he tilted it. Another point to Purpled’s words. “Would this

work?" He asked. "Tommy had one as well, they're a matching set."

"It'll be perfect." Purpled said, reaching for it. Tubbo pulled the compass back, still reluctant. "Will you take the deal? I'll enchant it to lead you to Tommy, and you'll let me look at that charm."

"And this deal is safe? No risk of harm or death?" Tubbo said, eyeing Purpled. It seemed unlikely, considering how much effort they had likely put in to heal him. But after Technoblade, he couldn't risk trusting the wrong person.

"Most likely." Purpled said. He shrugged at Tubbo's stare. "Enchanting something to find someone is fairly easy. Easier still with a compass. It wants to find something, I just give it something to lock onto. It shouldn't backfire that bad."

"I accept." Tubbo said. He nearly jerked back as the boy's warm palm brushed over his. Slowly, he forced himself to let go of the compass, but it felt like a Herculean task peeling away his fingers from their tight grip. Finally, the compass was left in Purpled's hand. Purpled didn't comment on how long it took, stepping back with the compass.

"Might want to look away for this bit." Purpled said. "The enchanting can get a bit bright."

Tubbo slowly nodded, shifting so he could face the wall. A glow built behind him, casting shadows onto the wall and making him stiffen. It kept building, overtaking the warm firelight to cast the room into bright violet light.

The worst part was the whispering that filled the air. If he tried to focus on it, it sounded like wind chimes in a breeze. But the moment he lost focus, it shaped into words just on the edge of his hearing. It was maddening.

He nearly jumped when the glow suddenly died, casting the room into shadow. "It's finished." Purpled said, his voice a bit wheezier now.

Tubbo turned, looking at the compass quizzically. There was a violet sheen to its surface now, magic flowing across its surface. He reached forward, cautiously taking it out of Purpled's hands. It felt warm to the touch, a strange static tingle racing across his fingers.

When he tilted it, the needle moved now. Pointing to Tommy. The thought made him grin.

"It'll lead you to your friend." Purpled said. Tubbo looked up at him. He looked like he had run five miles in the snow, his face pale and wheezing with each breath. "Or at least, it should. Now, pay up."

"Okay." Tubbo said. He stuffed the compass in his pocket, holding out his arm reluctantly. The bracelet had no visible clasp he could see, and it was too tight to slide over his hand. But that didn't stop the anxiety from gnawing away at him. "Sorry, I can't take it off."

"Figures." Purpled said. Tubbo nearly flinched back as Purpled grabbed his hand, gently tugging it closer. "They probably decided it wasn't worth you losing it and calling foul. Or maybe just losing it to another Court. This is pretty high level magic."

“Really?” Tubbo said, staring at the snowflake. The charm was pretty, but it just looked like a charm to him. For all of Philza’s pretty words, he kind of thought the man had just slapped a pretty bauble onto a bracelet and snickered about using it in the deal.

Purpled hummed, his palm flashing violet as he traced the charm with a finger. “It’s concentrated magic.” He said. “Probably gives its wearer limited control over the magic of the season it belongs to.”

“Huh.” Tubbo said. No wonder they kept saying the quest was near impossible. He doubted the other Courts would be willing to part with this kind of ‘pretty bauble’. “Can I use it?”

It would be a useful advantage to have magic of his own. Even if it was more of a temporary loan. Maybe his dreams of punching someone in the Winter Court would become reality!

Purpled just shrugged, releasing his hand. Tubbo pulled away fast, trying not to feel embarrassed at Purpled’s snicker.

“Maybe?” Purpled said, shrugging. “Fey magic can be kind of finicky. I think most magical artifacts are pretty wide ranged in terms of user though, at least from what I’ve seen. You’ll probably have to consciously activate it somehow.”

Well, that would be something to experiment with. “Thanks for that.” Tubbo said. “I should probably be heading out soon. I have a deadline to keep.”

“Yeah, you definitely do.” Purpled said wryly. “If that’s what you’re collecting, you need to be on your way, pronto. Ranboo will take you to the border of our little slice of land. Speaking of which...”

Tubbo nearly jumped out of his skin as he heard a door open and then slam shut, soft footsteps crossing the floorboards and stopping in the doorway. He spun around and had to force himself not to gasp.

Ranboo was tall, inhumanly so, his head nearly touching the top of the high doorway. Even stranger was the split of his skin between black and white, his eyes split between green and red. Tubbo narrowed his eyes, backing away.

The other stopped, his hands coming up. “Sorry.” He said. “I was listening in on your conversation and it seemed like a good time to come in. It’s nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you as well.” Tubbo said. He glanced at Purpled but the other teenager was completely relaxed. Another trap? “Are you...?”

“One of the Fey?” Ranboo said. He scratched the back of his head, glancing away. “I... don’t know?”

“You don’t know?” Tubbo said, frowning. That sounded like a convenient excuse. Whatever Ranboo was, it was clear he at the very least wasn’t fully human.

“I’ve got recurring memory loss.” Ranboo said apologetically, rubbing the back of his head. “I don’t really remember what happened and I forget things often. Purpled thinks it’s some

sort of side effect from whatever caused this change in me. Like a self defense mechanism of the magic or a traumatic repression of the experience. But I don't think I'm one of the Fey."

"He's not." Purpled broke in. "At least, he's definitely not fully Fey. Trust me, I've stabbed him with an iron knife."

"I don't think you can joke about stabbing people." Ranboo said, wringing his hands. Purpled stayed silent.

"Oh, that's alright then." Tubbo said, relaxing and ignoring how Ranboo facepalmed. He didn't fully trust Purpled but he didn't think the other would lie about this. It wasn't guaranteed but this whole situation felt like too much effort for a trick.

The Winter Court had been rude, impatient. If this was their work, they would have savored his brief confusion during the first deal and then slaughtered him for their Hunt.

And the more he examined Ranboo, the more normal the other seemed. Despite his lankiness, he still had baby fat clinging to his cheeks. His suit was a bit rumpled, the cuffs stained like he was hiking through the snow. Nothing like the inhuman perfection of Philza and Technoblade.

"Well, alright then." Ranboo said. He squinted at Purpled. "Wait, did you actually stab me--"

"Right, I think it's about time Tubbo was on his way." Purpled said, clapping his hands. Tubbo nodded.

"Thanks for your help." He offered. Even if Tubbo still had his suspicions, Purpled's deals had still been helpful. Purpled waved a hand.

"It worked out. I got what I wanted and you got what you wanted." He said. Tubbo took a few steps towards the door. "Oh, and Tubbo. If you, uh, need a place to crash after your deal ends, my house is open. In exchange for chores."

Tubbo blinked, glancing back at Purpled. Purpled avoided his eyes, watching the fire instead. But for the brief moment when their eyes met, he could see pure loneliness in the other's eyes.

...it probably sucked to be stuck inside a house all the time with just one other person for company. God knows Tubbo and Tommy had had their fights and they at least had the ability to take a walk and cool off. Or go to town when they were bored. "I'll keep that in mind." Tubbo said quietly. "Stay safe."

"I should be saying that to you." Purpled mumbled. Tubbo laughed, taking the last few steps through the doorway. Ranboo moved to the side, letting him pass.

He walked into the kitchen, taking the chance to actually look around this time. The stone counters cluttered with materials, frying pans and dishes battling for space against brewing stands and glass bottles. Even the floor was partially covered in supplies.

“Sorry about the mess.” Ranboo said, looking a bit embarrassed. “I forget to clean up and Purpled gets distracted halfway through.”

“Tommy’s the same way.” Tubbo said, softly. His heart panged at the thought. His friend was always easily distracted from his chores. It had annoyed Tubbo, but now he’d give almost anything to go back to that.

Ranboo nodded, looking sympathetic. He ducked around Tubbo, unlocking the wooden door and swinging it open. Tubbo shivered as a chill breeze slipped through. “Luckily, it’s not too far from our house to the Autumn Court. But, uh, I can walk you to Spring or Summer, if you’d like?”

“Autumn’s fine.” Tubbo said he ducked out onto the porch, hearing the snow crunch under his boots. The cabin was pretty nice on the outside, lacking the rough patches of Tommy and Tubbo’s cabin. He could see the remnants of a garden to his left, tools still half buried in the snow. “I won’t make you take me all the way to the other Courts.”

“It’s really not a big deal.” Ranboo said, stepping out and latching the door behind him. “Well, I mean, it is. But you could probably use the help from what I overheard.”

“Nah, I’ve got this in the bag.” Tubbo said. He didn’t need any more deals or debts right now. He stretched, trying to ignore the icy chill settling in. Besides, Autumn was known to be closely allied to the Winter Court. It was the biggest threat at the moment, the Court most likely to cast him right into the path of the Hunt.

Ranboo looked uncertain. “If you say so.” He said. For a moment, there was silence except for the crunching of snow underneath their boots. “Purpled meant it. You can come back here... Whether you succeed or not.”

Tubbo chuckled. “I’m gonna succeed.” He said. There was no other option. “But I appreciate the offer.”

Knowing the Winter Court, they probably would need a safe place to hide.

Huh. That reminded him of something.

“Why did you do it?” Tubbo asked. Ranboo stumbled, putting one hand on a tree to steady himself.

“Do what?”

“Bringing me back and using the potions.” Tubbo said. It had been bothering him, the amount of effort put into helping him. “I never agreed, you can’t get anything out of it.”

“It wasn’t about the agreement or making you owe me.” Ranboo said, ducking his head.

“Then why do it?” Tubbo pressed. “You had to know the Hunt’s target was likely me. If Technoblade had found us, you could’ve been killed.”

“Because you were hurt.” Ranboo said, like that explained anything. “Because there was no one else to help you but me. And I could help.”

The other took a deep breath before continuing. “I don’t like the system of debts and payments here.” He said. “Purpled thrives on it but I- I’d rather put that effort of constantly counting towards stuff that actually does things. Like helping people.”

“But you could’ve been hurt.” Tubbo said. He didn’t really believe anyone could be that selfless. Tommy would do it for him, but they had grown up together. Their loyalty was built on blood and a mutual willingness to burn down the world to keep the other safe. Ranboo was a stranger who didn’t even know Tubbo.

Ranboo didn’t answer him. “We’re here.” He said.

Tubbo broke out of his thoughts, looking down and then forward. The snow under their feet quickly gave way to dried leaves and withering grass. He could smell maple syrup on the wind, making his mouth water. “Already?” He asked. He thought it would take longer.

“If you’re asking about the sudden biome change, the borders between the seasons are fairly abrupt, the rulers don’t really like sharing space. If you’re asking about how quick we got here, me and Purpled live close to the border so the path isn’t too long from our house. If you go straight from here, and stay on the path, you should make your way to the Autumn Court quickly.” Ranboo babbled. He combed a hand through his hair, looking nervous. “I don’t know much about them, or at least, I don’t remember anything. Just don’t eat or drink anything.”

“I know.” Tubbo said. Practically every story had mentioned it. The timelessness of the Veil held starvation at bay, but many had still fallen for the trap that was Fey delicacies. One bite and you were locked into a debt with the particular Fey cook being able to dictate whatever they wanted as payment for greed. He swallowed hard, a bit nervous. “It’ll be fine.”

Ranboo nodded, opening his mouth and then closing it. “Goodbye.” He said softly.

“Bye.” Tubbo said. He kind of hoped it wouldn’t be their final meeting. They seemed... nice. Tommy would have liked them, in his own feral, overenthusiastic way. He trudged forward, out of winter and into autumn.

When he looked back, Ranboo was gone, slipping back through the trees.

He was alone again.

Tubbo took a deep breath, turning to follow the path. He couldn’t dawdle any longer.

“He’s getting close to the Autumn Court now.” Wilbur hums. He combs his hand through Tommy’s curls, admiring how the frost made it sparkle. The boy looked so cute, all cuddled up into his chest and snoring softly. He was warmer than Wilbur liked but that would be fixed soon.

Techno snorted from his place beside the bed. “You and your freakish sense of the boundaries.” He mocks.

“Says you.” Wilbur said, rolling his eyes. They both knew who the map freak was in the family, and it wasn’t him. He traced his thumb over Tommy’s cheek, cooing at how the boy mumbled and pressing him back down by the shoulder when he shifted in his sleep. “No, no, not yet, little one. Big brother Wilbur will sing you a lullaby in a bit. You have to sleep for a bit longer.”

Something wordless but sweet. Maybe he should go back to that cramped old cabin and get those music discs he watched his brother listen to? They’d make a fantastic gift when his little brother awoke.

Hm. Or maybe not, considering how the memories of that uppity human would still cling to them like decay clung onto leaves. Wilbur drummed his fingers on his chin, thinking. Maybe he could just learn to play the tunes? Or come up with something new, a song just for his brother, something better than anything a mortal could create.

Eh, he’d figure it out.

Tommy whimpered and Wilbur glanced down. Unconsciously, he had tightened his grip on Tommy’s shoulder, the frost beginning to creep under the skin. He softened immediately, cooing soft reassurance as he willed the frost to recede before it could hurt Tommy.

His little brother was still so fragile, so vulnerable to the cold. Wilbur hated it, hated how it reminded him of the mortality still clinging to his brother. Of the mortal who just couldn’t let go and let them have Tommy.

His eyes darkened at the thought of that selfish little brat. They were so greedy, keeping Tommy mortal and weak for their own selfish desires.

“Careful. I’m working on it.” Techno grumbled, picking up on the hidden meaning of his words and the dark look in his eyes. Wilbur tilted his head to look at him. “It’s not like you’re doing much.”

“I’m guarding Tommy.” Wilbur informed him. Techno snorts. “And I sent a letter to Schlatt. He’s very interested in meeting the kid so there’s no chance of them being a sneaky little thief and dodging him.”

“Two things.” Techno amends. He lowers the crossbow, putting a hand on Tommy’s shoulder. The boy shifts, but doesn’t move away. Wilbur catches the way his brother’s lips quirk into a small smile. “Dad has his own plan too. I can take breaks of I want.”

“I know, he’s doing his whole mysterious schtick instead of coming to see Tommy. He’s being so cute too.” Wilbur said fondly. He had known Tommy was meant for their family the moment he had seen him.

Philza had gone all soft and fond about how the boy had looked just like him. But Wilbur was more fascinated by the way he cursed at the blizzard, the way he raged against nature like his

feeble mortal life was more than a candle in the wind compared to it. Tommy was vibrant and so very alive compared to the rest of the mortals who crawled around in the mud of their world and pretended it meant something.

The castle wouldn't be boring anymore now that their little spitfire had joined the family.

"If only he had less baggage." Techno growled.

Wilbur waved a hand. "It'll be handled." He said. Either Schlatt would trick the kid into one of his infamously one sided deals, or the kid would be taken into the Autumn Court. Even if they somehow escaped, more dangers lurked in the Veil for uppity mortals. He smirked at his brother. "Besides, you're The Blade. You can catch a little mortal if you have to. Or is the big, bad Blade losing his touch?"

"Oh, shut up with that." Techno said, rolling his eyes. Wilbur yelped when the other smacked his shoulder, reaching up to rub at it. Techno could hit hard.

"I can't believe you hit me with our new baby brother sleeping right here." Wilbur complained.

"And I can't believe you slipped that nickname to the mortals. Guess we're even." Techno said smugly.

Wilbur laughed, both of the two looking down at their newest brother as he mumbled in his sleep again. Both had the same dark look in their eyes as they watched him sleep.

No matter what, Tommy wouldn't be leaving the family.

Chapter End Notes

Ranboo and Tommy appearances eyyyy! And the first Court is revealed! I actually heavily debated over which Court would be first before settling on Autumn. It's gonna be... interesting.

If you enjoy this, leave a kudos, bookmark, and/or review! I love seeing the reviews you guys write.

Falling Leaves

Chapter Notes

Eyyyyy, Autumn Court Time!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

If the forest hadn't been the territory of the Autumn Court, Tubbo would have loved it. He had always been fond of autumn and how the leaves changed color. He'd drag Tommy out for hour-long walks, plan small detours during their travels to see the leaves change. Tommy had teased him for being an old man but Tubbo had cherished those memories.

This autumnal forest was perfectly paused at the very height of autumn and the leaves almost seemed to blaze with color wherever he looked. Tubbo could almost ignore the bittersweet feeling as he looked at the leaves. If Tommy was here, he would have raked together a leaf pile for them to take turns jumping into.

As much as he loved their mountain, he missed the forests further away and their brilliant autumnal displays instead of the evergreen pine trees.

He grimaced, glancing back to the path in front of him and dismissing the memories. He had to concentrate, the path was hidden under a thick layer of fallen leaves. One wrong step and he'd lose his way.

Which was possibly part of the Fey's plan.

Tubbo glanced up to check the path ahead and froze, slowly lowering his raised foot.

He almost missed the fox just off the path, its rich auburn fur blending in with the leaves around it. Tubbo froze, one foot still in the air as the fox looked up at him. He couldn't miss the glint of intelligence in the creature's eyes.

It yipped at him, tilting his head innocently and taking a few steps backwards. When he didn't move, it yipped again and took another step back. An invitation then. "That's not going to work." Tubbo said pointedly. "Good try and all, but I know you're not a normal fox."

For a moment, he thought his deduction was wrong and he was talking to a normal fox like a crazy person. But then the fox slumped a little, glaring at him for a moment before turning its head away. With a swish of its tail, it took a few steps back again, turning to regard him. Tubbo stared back.

It almost felt like a scene straight out of a fairy tale, one of the soft and sweet ones told to very young children who got nightmares from the real stories. A lost princess, or well, prince stumbling across an animal companion in their time of woe.

But this was real life. He was no prince and this wasn't a helpful animal coming to ease his plight. Tubbo had to fight the urge to punt the fox before it could do something to him.

"You should follow." The fox said. Tubbo flinched back, surprised. "I'll take you right to where you need to go."

"Really." Tubbo said, considering the path in front of him. It was tempting to step off the path and follow the fox. The forest was lovely and quiet, what could happen? And those thoughts were exactly why he needed to be wary. "You'll take me where I need to go."

God, if Tommy could see him now, talking to a talking fox. He would have been laughing his head off.

"Of course." The fox said. It puffed out its furry chest. "The king is very interested in meeting the human who made a deal with the Winter king. He sent me to guide you."

"But is it where I want to go?" Tubbo asked, trying to shove down the desire to follow. It terrified him how part of his mind whispered to him to trust the fox. Maybe if he had more friends, he might have been caught in the lull, but he trusted no one but Tommy and it made it easier to catch it.

But it still filled him with dread. Was this why Tommy hadn't been scared of the Fey taking him away?

The fox tilted its head, looking confused. "Isn't that the same thing? You want to go where you need to go."

"I know where I want to go." Tubbo said. The compass was a heavy weight in his pocket. "But you may think I need to go to a place that I don't want to go."

"That's a matter of opinion." The fox said. Its eyes regarded him steadily but it was tense now.

"My opinion is that I think I'm good." Tubbo said, taking a deep breath. He shrugged, watching the fox warily. "This path should take me straight to the Autumn Court."

The fox's tail flicked. "My way is faster. It's my special shortcut." The fox said. "Don't you need to be traveling fast right now? The clock is always moving."

Tubbo flinched. That was a low blow and the fox knew it. "It may be faster." Tubbo said, trying to keep his voice steady. "But that doesn't mean it'll be safer."

By the way the fox twitched, Tubbo knew he had gotten it right. One piece of advice repeated over and over in the stories he heard was not to leave the paths.

The paths were supposed to be neutral areas. If he was attacked while traveling on the path, he could defend himself and the attacker wouldn't be able to claim a blood debt.

Leave and he was a trespasser who could be killed on sight with impunity. It'd be hard to argue his way out of a blood debt he'd get for defending himself if he survived. Tubbo

swallowed hard at the thought.

“You don’t know for sure that it won’t be safe.” The fox mumbled, looking away. “It will get you to the Autumn Court.”

“But as a talking head or trapped in an eternal sleep because I wandered into danger willingly.” Tubbo said. The need to follow, to trust, still lingered but he could think through it now. “Thank you for your offer, but I’m going to have to decline.”

He started walking again. After a moment, small footsteps joined his footsteps, the fox trailing at his side. “It would have just been hobgoblins.” The fox said. Tubbo nearly stumbled, catching himself before he could fall.

“A swarm of hobgoblins can kill a person.” Tubbo pointed out, his voice shaking a bit. He had been that close to serious injury or death.

“Only by accident.” The fox said dismissively. “They’re pranksters. I’m sure you could’ve gotten out before their pranks escalated that much. And it really is such a great shortcut.”

“I’m pretty sure having to deal with hobgoblins negated the shortcut part of it.” Tubbo said. He wasn’t quite sure why he was still talking to the murderous fox. Loneliness?

The forest around him was quiet and empty. No bird song, no squirrels. Nothing. It grated on his nerves.

“Humans. Always so dramatic.” The fox said. They hopped up on a log, trotting across it. “You can call me Fundy.”

Tubbo side eyed the fox. The name seemed familiar, he just couldn’t figure out where he heard it from. It was annoying, another thing to add to the long list of what was frustrating him right now. “You can call me Tubbo.” He said eventually.

“Tubbo.” Fundy said, rolling the name around on its tongue. It sighed in disappointment and Tubbo grinned. He wasn’t going to be an easy mark handing over his real name. “What kind of nickname is that?”

“What kind of nickname is Fundy?” Tubbo retorted. Tommy had given him the nickname when they were young, not being able to say his name correctly, and it had stuck. He liked it and that was all that mattered.

“Touché.” Fundy said before lapsing into silence.

Fundy’s body began to crack and twist. Tubbo had to look away as his brain screamed at the sight, unable to handle anything so inhuman. He swallowed back the bile that surged up his throat, trying to forget what he saw.

When Fundy finished and Tubbo turned back, Fundy looked like a bipedal fox, only coming up to Tubbo’s shoulders. A jacket was slung around his shoulders, his hat crooked on his head.

“Do most Autumn Fey do that or is that just a you thing?” Tubbo asked, not quite able to hide his curiosity. Full shape shifting was common in stories but he had always dismissed it as a bit of exaggeration on the part of the storyteller.

Fundy grinned at him, revealing sharp teeth. “Are you willing to trade for that answer?” He asked. He laughed when Tubbo shook his head. “Too bad then.”

Tubbo scowled at him, focusing on the path in front of him. He should have expected it. But Purpled’s and Ranboo’s kindness had softened him a little. Made him think that maybe people weren’t so terrible. Then again, Fundy had just tried to trick him to his death and he couldn’t forget that.

“That’s it?” Fundy said, adjusting his hat. “I was expecting a bit more... action, you know? There’s a lot of rumors around you.”

“Yeah, well, I suppose I’m disappointing then.” Tubbo retorted. He wasn’t a trained animal, to dance on command. He had enough deals to work on right now.

“You are.” Fundy whined. “We should go to hobgoblin territory. It would be so much more entertaining than watching you stomp along the path.”

“For the last time, no-“

“Be polite to our guests, Fundy.” Tubbo jumped, stopping in his tracks as a new voice broke in. How had he not noticed someone walking up to them?

There was a soft chuckle but Tubbo was frozen, staring at the man that seemed to materialize out of the trees next to him.

Some instinctive voice in his hindbrain screamed at him to run and he nearly gave in to it. The man smirked at him as if they could hear Tubbo’s internal struggle.

Tubbo could almost mistake him for human with his messy brown hair and the stubble on his face. But the broad ram horns and glowing amber eyes with horizontal pupils told a different story. Unlike Phil’s soft looking robes on Technoblade’s regal armor, the man wore a perfectly tailored suit.

“Sir.” Fundy said, half whining and half confused. “I was just following him as he went to the Autumn Court. It’s the rules.”

The man waved a hand. “Yeah, yeah, rules.” He said. “Head off for a bit, I’m gonna walk with him.”

Tubbo clamped down on an instinctive plea. He didn’t want Fundy to go. But it’s not like Fundy would actually help him if the other wanted to do something to him.

But it still wasn’t reassuring how Fundy immediately turned tail and fled. Tubbo tried not to flinch back at the eerie eyes shifted him, something dark and unrecognizable in their depths.

“Walk with me.” The man said. Tubbo glanced down the path, wondering if he could outrun him. “Look, right now, I don’t want to hurt you. But if you make me chase you down, that can change very quickly.”

Tubbo eyed him warily. Something about him seemed familiar, he just wasn’t quite sure how. Or maybe that was his common sense screaming at him to run or take a swing at the man. “I’m not leaving the path.” He said.

“That’s fine. Walk with me.” Tubbo hesitated for a moment before following, jogging to keep up with the man’s longer stride. “Tubbo, isn’t it? Heard a lot about ya, you’ve been making some deals that have made some waves.”

“Just the one.” Tubbo mumbled, trying not to glance towards where his compass was hidden. “Since you know who I am, who are you?”

“You don’t recognize me.” Something dark flickered in the man’s eyes.

“The Fey don’t exactly come with picture books.” Tubbo said defensively. He only had descriptions of the Winter Court because they were relatively close to town and tended to cause more havoc there in their rare chaotic periods.

He knew that the Autumn Court was closely allied with the Winter Court, forming a United force against Summer and Spring that kept balance. It would be one of the hardest deals to make and Tubbo was ready to get to business.

“Hey, no need to be so defensive, kid. We’re just talking.” The man said. Tubbo bit back the urge to tell him that the man had challenged him first. He had to keep a cool head right now, he wasn’t going to be like Technoblade. “Call me Schlatt.”

With a yelp, Tubbo stumbled in shock, bringing his hands up to catch himself before he hit the ground.

Before he could hit it, a cool hand wrapped around his upper arm, yanking him back up to his feet. Tubbo looked up to meet Schlatt’s calculating eyes.

“Nice catch.” He said neutrally. Schlatt. The king of the Autumn Court. Well known for his cruel deals and charisma. Tubbo tried to lean away to get the man to let go, but Schlatt just moved with him.

“Bit of an anxious one, aren’t you?” He said. Tubbo nearly stumbled when Schlatt started walking again, pulling him along. “I can do something about that.”

“I’m good.” Tubbo said quickly. He coughed, trying to imitate Tommy’s boldness. “I think you know what I came here for. I don’t need anything else.”

“Getting to the business talk already?” Schlatt said, rolling his eyes. Tubbo had to press down a flare of annoyance. “Come on, wait until we’re in my throne room. I’ve got to look my best when I’m crafting deals.”

“You brought it up first.” Tubbo said. He winced a little at the way his voice trembled slightly. He knew how to scam people, maybe that would work here too.

“Did I?” Schlatt’s voice was amused. Tubbo bristled.

He tried to distract himself thinking about how to make the deal. It wouldn’t be great for him if he had to make a deal in the throne room. Schlatt would hold most of the cards and any escape route would be heavily guarded. Somehow, some way, he’d have to convince Schlatt to make the deal, preferably outside of the throne room.

But Tubbo’s scammed a lot of people. Usually with Tommy but he couldn’t see why he couldn’t try to scam a Fey king.

Hopefully, he wouldn’t end up dead because of this.

“Are you saying you can’t make a deal out of your throne room? Wow, and I thought Technoblade was a scaredy cat. Must be a Fey thing.” Tubbo said. He looked down at the dried leaves, certain his eyes would give away his plan.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Schlatt asked, his eyes narrowed.

Tubbo shrugged. Normally it would be Tommy luring aggression and Tubbo hanging back. Tommy always knew what buttons to press. It was almost weird to do it without him and Tubbo had to catch himself from searching out Tommy for guidance. “I’m just saying, first Technoblade declared a hunt, and now you insist you can only do your deal in your throne room. I think you’re afraid.”

“You should watch your words.” Schlatt said. A breeze whipped around their feet, churning up the leaves. “Would be a pity if someone were to take offense.”

“I’m just saying.” Tubbo defended. “It’s kind of weak to only make deals when you’re in your throne room. I bet you have guards and everything to scare people for you.”

“I don’t need armor and weapons to be terrifying.” Schlatt growled. Tubbo flinched as his grip tightened, wincing. “And I don’t need a throne room to make a deal.”

Hook, line, sinker.

“Prove it.” Tubbo challenged. The quicker he got the charm, the quicker he could leave and move on to the next Court.

Schlatt opened his mouth and then closed it again. All of his anger melted away in a moment, leaving only the deadly calm behind. “You almost got me there.” He murmured, regarding Tubbo as if he was something new and completely foreign.

“Got you?” Tubbo parroted, tilting his head in the way that always made people dismiss him.

“And here I thought you’d be the gullible one.” Schlatt said. Tubbo couldn’t recognize the look in his eyes but it still sent a shiver up his spine. “I’m almost impressed, but you have a long way to go before you can trick me.”

He squeezed his shoulder again, making Tubbo wince. What was that for? He couldn't really tell if Schlatt was angry or not, and it made him uneasy.

"I just don't see the point in dragging this out." Tubbo said, dropping the innocent act. "I'm know you already know what I want."

"I do. Wilbur wrote me a whole letter about it." That explained a lot. "Nice guy, not very pleased with what you're planning."

"Well, that's his problem." Tubbo mumbled. He wasn't very pleased with Wilbur or the man's plans either. "And if he's writing to you, then that means he has his own plan anyways so it evens out, I think."

That got him a low chuckle. "You're clever." Schlatt said. Tubbo finally flinched at that.

Most people didn't think of him as clever. To the village, he was Tommy's shadow, friendly, but not quite as loud. Tommy knew he was clever and that was enough.

But Schlatt said it and it felt like the man was trying to peel open his head and see what made him tick.

"Thanks for the compliment." Tubbo said begrudgingly. "You look like a goat."

"Comes with the territory." Schlatt said, completely unaffected by the backhanded compliment. Tubbo nearly tripped again when the hand on his shoulder moved to ruffle his hair. But Schlatt didn't seem to notice or care about his shock. "Look, let's forget the business for now and I'll give you a tour. For free, because I'm a nice guy."

"Will this tour be safe for me?" Tubbo asked, warily.

"You'll be under my protection, I'd like to see anything else touch you." Schlatt assured. Tubbo glanced at him, unable to tell what he was thinking.

That was a big gift to offer. But why the protection? Was he trying to keep him here until the Hunt caught up? "I really can't stay for long." Tubbo said, glancing away.

Schlatt waved a hand. "I insist." He said. "In fact, consider it a prerequisite for our deal."

Tubbo slumped a bit. "Fine." He said. He needed the deal to happen, and soon. "How much further to the Autumn Court?"

"You're standing in it." Schlatt said, gesturing. Tubbo looked around. There was nothing around them but the same broad trees. He stared at Schlatt, trying to convey his confusion.

Schlatt smirked, pressing his hand against one of the trees. Under his hand, the bark glowed, an outline of a door forming. Tubbo's eyes widened and he leaned forward slightly to see better.

"You live in the trees?" He said. The tree itself was large, wider than Tubbo was tall. But not that large.

“They’re bigger on the inside.” Schlatt said as if he could tell what Tubbo was thinking. He removed his hand, the glow fading away. Tubbo stared at the tree but couldn’t see where the door was.

Slowly, he stepped forward, careful not to leave the path. The tree bark felt cool and rough, not even a raised seam to show the door he knew was there.

When he glanced back at Schlatt, the Fae was watching him with an oddly warm look in his eyes. “They only respond to the Fey.” He said. Tubbo flushed, hot embarrassment surging in his chest as he pulled his hand away quickly.

“Makes sense.” He mumbled. Of course it needed magic.

“I’ll show you the inside of one later.” Schlatt said, the hand returned to his shoulder, pulling him along.

“I don’t need that much of a tour.” Tubbo denied. He was on a time limit here. But Schlatt didn’t respond, continuing to pull him along the path.

“Mine is the oldest and largest tree.” He said as if Tubbo had never spoken. “Usually there’s more Fey out and about but I warned them that I didn’t want to be bothered today.”

“What about Fundy?” Tubbo asked. Schlatt glanced at him.

“What about him?”

“He was out and about.” Tubbo said. And tried to trick him into hobgoblin territory. He clung to the reminder, that as friendly as Schlatt acted right now, there was always a hidden catch.

“He’s one of my advisors, he gets a bit more freedom than the rest.” Schlatt said with a dismissive wave of his hand. The breeze spun along with it, whipping Tubbo’s curls into a windswept mess. “And I wanted to see what would happen.”

“What would happen.” Tubbo echoed, tensing at the implications. Schlatt had been watching him the entire time. The thought made him shiver a bit.

“You did well, kid.” Schlatt said. There was that weird warm look again. “There’s not many that can think their way through Fundy’s words. He’s pretty convincing.”

Tubbo thought of the odd trust that had filled him and shuddered a bit. Was that a specific ability or something general to the Autumn Fey? He had never trusted Philza or Technoblade, instead, the sight of them had filled him with fear and rage.

The thought that Schlatt could be using that on him now curdled his stomach with fear.

“Are we heading to your throne room next?” Tubbo asked, hopeful. He froze under the look Schlatt gave him, having to force himself to keep moving.

“Shut up about the throne room.” Schlatt said darkly. “We’ll make the deal when I say so.”

That didn't exactly work for him. Tubbo took a deep breath, trying to focus on the trees around him. "Do you have other advisors?" Anyone that could be scammed into a deal instead of Schlatt?

Schlatt hummed in thought. "There's Fundy. And then there's Quackity. Bit of a killjoy sometimes, but he's great at carrying out what I need done. He's probably hanging around here somewhere, I gave him some tasks to keep him busy."

"Are they the next stop on the tour?" Tubbo asked, trying not to sound too hopeful.

"Already angling for a new person to scam?" Schlatt said, his voice flat. Not a question. Tubbo stiffened, glancing back down the path. "Nah, kid, you'll meet them later. You'll have plenty of time to get to know them."

Right. That was... not great. How long did Schlatt plan to stretch this out? He felt a sickening feeling fill him as he thought about his options. Tubbo took a deep breath, trying to calm himself.

Schlatt couldn't stop him from making the deal, it went against the very nature of Fey to deny a deal. Twist, yes, play for time, but not outright refuse. But that didn't mean Schlatt couldn't start his own Hunt or push the deal until Tubbo was on a major time crunch.

He yelped as an arm was slung around his shoulder. "You think too much." Schlatt remarked. Tubbo's face scrunched up. The Fey king smelled like alcohol and lingering smoke with a hint of maple syrup. With anyone else, it might have been nice. With Schlatt, it made him shiver a bit. "You cold?"

"Huh?" Tubbo said, bewildered by the sudden change.

"You've been shivering a lot." Schlatt said, looking down at him.

"Oh, uh, I'm fine. It's not that cold." Tubbo said warily. It was a bit chilly here but his warm clothes took the edge off. He hadn't exactly dressed for the Veil, but he had had it worse before anyways. But he wasn't going to say that and indirectly tell Schlatt he was scared of him.

Schlatt clicked his tongue before pulling away and shrugging off his jacket, draping it over Tubbo's shoulders. "Keep it clean or I'll bury you alive." He said.

"Is this some kind of deal?" Tubbo asked, narrowing his eyes and trying to ignore the threat.

"Nah. You just look pathetic right now." Schlatt said. He reached up and readjusted his tie. "No strings attached and no one will attack you for wearing it. In Autumn territory at least."

Tubbo chewed his lip for a moment before reaching up and pulling the jacket on fully. He did need to stay warm right now. He had foolishly left his parka back at their house, using the cold to keep him focused on his painting. If they were going to give him a jacket, he couldn't complain and it'd be easy to ditch later.

He could kind of see how Schlatt was so dangerous now. Like Fundy, he had a sort of magnetism to him that made Tubbo feel a bit warm inside. A little more willing to listen. He had to keep reminding himself that Schlatt wasn't as nice as he seemed sometimes.

The jacket was surprisingly warm, but a bit oversized. The sleeves went past his hands and it completely covered his cream colored sweater. He was pretty sure it was expensive enough to feed an entire village for a month. Tubbo had to roll the sleeves up to free his hands before looking back up at Schlatt.

Who had another odd look in his eye as he watched Tubbo fiddle with the jacket. Envy maybe? Anger? No, not that, warmer. Something greedy like a merchant who saw something they wanted to buy.

Tubbo shifted, a bit uncomfortable under his stare. "You clean up nice." Schlatt remarked, smiling. "Get you a full suit and you might actually look respectable."

"Maybe." Tubbo said, noncommittal. "I look great in anything and I don't really need a suit."

"Maybe." Schlatt echoed, grinning. He reached out, one hand settling on Tubbo's shoulder again. Tubbo flinched, but didn't push him away. "Since we're such great pals now, why don't you tell me a bit about yourself? We can make a bit of a game out of it. You ask a question and I ask a question."

"I want to be able to refuse an answer." Tubbo said. It didn't sound too bad. He'd be able to get information on Schlatt that could earn him what the deal would be.

The downside was, Schlatt would get information too.

"Fine then." Schlatt said. He tilted his head up, thinking for a moment. "What's your favorite thing about autumn?"

"What?" Tubbo asked, confused. His favorite thing? Why would Schlatt care about that?

"That'll count as one of your questions." Schlatt said. Tubbo flushed a bit. "Come on, everyone likes something."

"I like the leaves?" Tubbo said. He shrugged at Schlatt's bemused look. "When they change color. It's nice."

"It is, isn't it?" Schlatt said, looking up at the trees. "I've got Fey whose whole job is taking care of those. Solid work, they do a great job. Do you make a lot of deals?"

"No?" Tubbo said cautiously. Where was Schlatt going with this? "Not with the Fey."

"So, the Winter Court is your only Fey deal currently?" Schlatt said, sidestepping a tree as they walked. "You got the rough end of the deal there."

"I did what I could with what I had." Tubbo said. He was lucky he hadn't been slaughtered outright. "And yes, it is. That's your question."

“Got me.” Schlatt said, grinning at him.

Tubbo considered his options. “Will the Hunt come here?” He asked. Was Schlatt just trying to buy time with this question game?

“No.” Schlatt said. He raised an eyebrow at Tubbo’s disbelieving look. “I might be allies with Winter but a Hunt coming on my land led by a royal prince? That goes a bit far.”

“Understandable.” Tubbo mumbled, turning the new fact over in his head. There was still a bit of wriggle room with that answer but he felt something inside of him ease a little at the knowledge Technoblade wouldn’t be hiding behind the next tree. “Next question.”

“Got any other family or friends around? Other than the kid you’re so desperate to save.” Schlatt said. His eyes were dark again when Tubbo looked at him.

Tubbo stiffened, pausing in the middle of the path. “That’s not relevant.” He said but he knew that he’d already revealed the answer. Schlatt just smirked at him but Tubbo just scowled back, uncomfortably aware of the sore spot Schlatt had just poked. “How long do you want to play this game?”

“Until I know you better. So, I was thinking, I’ll show you the mines next, yeah? We do a lot here-“ Schlatt said, waving a hand to the side.

But Tubbo was tired of this game. Tired and frustrated. If Schlatt had started it as a way to hurt him, it was starting to work.

“I really would like to go to the throne room. We can play on the way?” Tubbo said, fiddling with the hem of the jacket. “I’m sure this place is beautiful, but I really can’t stay long. If I don’t get the deal soon, I’m just going to go to the next Court and come back later.”

The grin disappeared as fast as it came and Tubbo shivered as the temperature dropped a few degrees. “Fine, if you’re going to be so stubborn about it.” Schlatt said coolly. No longer the semi friendly Fae who ruffled his hair and gave him his jacket, but the king of the Autumn Court. He turned away, walking down the path. “To the throne room it is.”

Tubbo stood still for a moment, one hand reaching up to his shoulder before falling away. He shook his head, hurrying to catch up.

He couldn’t quite understand why he felt more alone without Schlatt holding him.

Chapter End Notes

What Tubbo Means: So I don’t run out of time, I’m gonna go to another Court and work on getting their charms first then come back.

What Schlatt Hears: I’m gonna go get adopted by someone else.

This chapter is a day early from my usual once a week schedule, and I was pretty excited to post it. Also, go check out JadeSpeedster17's prompt collection! They're doing great things with this AU.

Crimson Leaves

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tubbo shook off the odd feeling quickly, hurrying to catch up to Schlatt. Despite the Fae's clear anger, his footsteps were still slow, measured. Not quick enough that Tubbo would fall behind too far but just fast enough that Tubbo could tell the Fae was still annoyed.

He took advantage of the quiet to look around as they walked. The young trees soon gave way to older trees, their bark worn and their trunks gnarled. The bright sunlight that had been filtering through their leaves began to dim and Tubbo shivered a bit, veering just a little bit closer to Schlatt.

Just a little bit. He doubted anyone would attack him when he was next to the king. And Schlatt hadn't lunged at him yet.

The Fae glanced at him before slowing a little, still not saying anything. Should he say something? Would that make it better? Tubbo opened his mouth before closing it again, flushing red with embarrassment.

He wasn't going to start babbling for Schlatt's attention like some child whining for their mother! Why did he even think about doing that?

Tubbo wrapped his arms around himself, taking the silence to process that. Something about Schlatt made the Fae slip under his guard, an odd feeling building up inside him.

The odd feeling in his chest wasn't the easy trust that Fundy had inspired. It was a weird shivery sense of longing that had grown from the moment he saw the king. Something bittersweet that sat heavy in his chest and clouded his thoughts. He had mistaken it for his guilt and worry over Tommy but now he could see that it was something else.

Some of the rumors he did know had hinted at the Autumn king inciting others to greed, from on the spot rushed deals to the tale of a man who traded his entire life away for gold without a moment's thought.

Stupid, stupid Tubbo, he berated himself. He hadn't really thought about the rumors being true before, assuming that the mentioned greed magic was people embellishing the tales a bit. Of course people longed for gold or magic when it was right in front of them!

Tubbo flushed a bit. He hadn't even given it a second thought until now, when he realized how the lack of touch made him itch a bit and want to reach out, that the silence made him want to fill it with comfortable small talk so Schlatt would stop giving him the silent treatment. He thought he had gotten over his need for approval years ago.

But what exactly was Schlatt making him want? Did the man think he would make a deal for something else? That wouldn't be happening and Schlatt should know that.

“We’re here.” Tubbo jolted a bit as he was knocked out of his thoughts. Schlatt looked at him, his expression inscrutable.

Tubbo turned his gaze to the tree. It was absolutely massive, three times the size of the trees around it. He couldn’t even see the upper branches through the lower canopy around it. Unlike the trees around it, its leaves were a crimson red as dark as blood. Tubbo frowned.

The tree was usually described as having golden leaves like golden coins that chimed in the breeze. Was that a lie?

“It’s magic. They change color.” Schlatt said as if he could tell what Tubbo was thinking.

“Really?” Tubbo said bemused. “Don’t most trees change color in the autumn?”

“This one tends to change its colors for other reasons than season. The change depends on a lot of factors.” Schlatt mused. “I mean, there’s my mood, whether the Autumn Court welcomes you, if you can hold onto your memories and goal, the phase of the moon, your blood type-“

“Are you making fun of me?” Tubbo said, glaring at the king.

“A little at the end.” Schlatt said. His smirk had returned now. “The tree doesn’t care about the phases of the moon.”

He reached forward, pressing a hand on the bark. The glow seeped out again, outlining a massive set of double doors that were fit for a castle. He pulled away, gesturing at the doorway.

“Do I just walk through?” Tubbo said, hesitating a bit. Once he walked into the throne room, the game was kicked into high gear. One wrong move and he’d be dead.

“That’s what you do with doorways.” Schlatt said. He held out his hand. “I can hold your hand if you’re scared.”

Tubbo flushed red in embarrassment. “I’m fine.” He said. He took a deep breath, stepping forward to press his hand against the bark. It was warm, almost burning, and there was a bit of give to it.

This was fine. Absolutely fine. He’d already entered Philza’s throne room. What’s the worst that could happen?

Bad thought. There were a lot of bad things.

Schlatt chuckled, a warm hand wrapped around his upper shoulder, and Tubbo yelped as he was abruptly yanked through.

“I thought I said I was fine.” He hissed, stumbling a bit. His stomach lurched a bit and Tubbo clamped his mouth shut, taking a few deep breaths and trying to ignore the heavy hand that rubbed his back in a facsimile of concern.

Slowly, his stomach settled and he shook the hand off, ignoring the pang in his chest. “Stop that.” He said, annoyed. Schlatt was the one who had pulled him through in the first place!

He looked up and his anger gave way into awe.

The room almost felt cozy with dark burgundy walls and oak flooring. A heavy looking wooden table took up almost the whole room, surrounded by tastefully carved chairs. The ones closer to the door were likely for the humans coming to make a deal. They were plainer chairs, lacking the cushions and more elaborate carvings of those closer to the throne. Practically designed to remind you of what you didn’t have.

At the head of the table was the throne. Instead of being carved, it looked more like it had simply grown out of the floorboard, the top part of the backboard separating into broad branches with their own crimson leaves.

“You took too long.” Schlatt said, looking around. “Nice room, ain’t it? I picked out all of the decorations.”

Tubbo pursed his lips, nodding. He could see why. Unlike Philza’s cold throne room, this one was a bit more... inviting? It gave the illusion that Schlatt was more human-like. Safer for lack of a better word. Another layer of manipulation.

He tried to pull away and pick a chair, one of the plain ones closest to him. But Schlatt grabbed his shoulder before he could.

“Don’t be a stranger.” Schlatt said. He pulled Tubbo to the chair that was closest to the throne, sitting to its direct right. “I insist.”

“I don’t think that’s necessary.” Tubbo said, looking at the chair and trying to push down the sudden pang of desire in his chest. It looked strangely inviting with a soft looking cream colored cushion, and was carved with designs that looked like pumpkins on the vine.

The chair didn’t seem cursed or enchanted. But how was he to know?

“It’s safe.” Schlatt said. He smirked at Tubbo. “We’re just getting to the fun part that you all but begged for. I wouldn’t curse you now.”

But he would later. Tubbo filed that bit away. “It’s safe?” He asked. “For humans.”

Something dark flashed in Schlatt’s eyes before the veneer of friendliness covered it again. “The chair is safe for humans.” He agreed. Tubbo glanced between him and the chair again, hesitating slightly before slowly sitting down.

It was... surprisingly comfortable? The cushion wasn’t quite as comfortable as their crude hand stitched ones back at their cabin, but still quite comfortable. His feet just barely grazed the floor so Tubbo pulled them up instead, curling into the large chair. It was nice, kind of cozy.

Tubbo glanced back up, catching the tail end of another warm look. He frowned. “Is there something on my face?”

“No, why?” Schlatt said. He looked smug. Tubbo squeaked a little as the Fae leaned in close. “I don’t see anything.”

“Just asking.” Tubbo said quickly. Schlatt could probably put a knife through his throat from this distance. “You keep looking at me funny.”

“Do I?” Schlatt hummed. He sat on his own throne, fingers drumming on the armrest. Tubbo fought the urge to inch his chair a bit further away. “We look a bit alike, don’t we?”

“I guess?” Tubbo said. He couldn’t see many similarities between them other than their brown hair. Schlatt was too oddly inhuman for them to look too similar.

Was this some kind of ploy? Something to make him more sympathetic or trusting? Tubbo turned the words over and over in his head, looking for meaning. Why would Schlatt say that?

“Maybe it’s just a human thing to comment on other’s looks.” Schlatt said, his grin a bit mocking. “Most humans look alike to me, kind of ugly. You should consider my words a compliment.”

Which. Wow. Rude. Tubbo knew he wasn’t exactly ‘special’ in terms of looks. He was absolutely adorable, but Tommy was the one people tended to look at first with his blond hair and blue eyes that were uncommon amongst those who lived in the mountains.

But Schlatt’s compliment seemed to be either completely backhanded or meant to manipulate. And either way, Tubbo hated it. He scowled at Schlatt, ignoring the man’s chuckles.

“What are you offering for the deal?” Tubbo said, changing the subject. If he had the advantage of surprise, he would have danced around it a bit. Hinted that he wanted the charm but played it cool. He was in a delicate situation right now because Schlatt knew how much he wanted the charm.

“Not yet.” Schlatt said, and Tubbo had to crush the urge to lunge at him. “Gotta call in some witnesses, make this transaction official.”

“I don’t think we need to do that.” Tubbo said, narrowing his eyes. Very few deals needed witnesses because of the magical contract that formed when both sides agreed.

Witnesses implied that whatever Schlatt was asking for, it was steep. A contract that required outside arbiters to confirm and uphold the terms for the involved people.

“It is.” Schlatt said, uncaring of Tubbo’s concern. He waved a hand, sending a breeze through the room. “I’d hate for anyone to say that I was cheating you unfairly.”

Schlatt could try. Tubbo narrowed his eyes, glaring at him. Schlatt grinned back, utterly unrepentant. “How long will it take for them to get here?”

“Oh, not long.” There was a soft whispery sound like leaves brushing against the ground. “In fact, that should be them.”

So fast?

Tubbo's head snapped around, watching with wide eyes as a few people strode into the room. Only one that he recognized. Fundy grinned at him, settling into a chair further down the table that was carved with leaping foxes.

"How the fuck do you expect me to finish the tasks you give me if you keep calling me away?" One of the Fae snarled, sitting on the other side of Schlatt. Quackity, maybe? Tubbo remembered Schlatt mentioning a Quackity.

Like Philza, the Fae had wings, though his wings were smaller and vibrant yellow. Small golden feathers peeked out from his dark hair, disappearing under his beanie.

The other Fae was completely unfamiliar to him. Unlike Quackity and Fundy, they didn't sit down, instead leaning against the wall next to the door. They had hair the color of old bark and Tubbo felt his stomach twist a little when he realized what he thought were hair barrettes were actually mushrooms poking through the man's hair. His eyes were hidden by white goggles and he wore a set of blue armor instead of a suit.

"Don't be like that sweetheart, we've got a guest." Schlatt purred, leaning forward on the table. Tubbo rolled his eyes, freezing when Quackity looked at him.

Only for the Fae to do a double take. Tubbo blinked as Quackity glanced between him and Schlatt before the surprise disappeared behind a mask of friendliness. "Him?"

"Yes." Schlatt said firmly. Tubbo's brow furrowed. It felt like there was something he was missing to this conversation and it grated on him.

Quackity looked back at Tubbo. "Okay then." He said. He grinned, a soft trustworthy one that Tubbo disliked immediately. "I'm Quackity, one of Schlatt's advisors. It's more like a glorified assistant position really."

"But you do such a good job." Schlatt purred. Quackity swatted at him. "I can't believe you're trying to hit your king!"

Quackity rolled his eyes. Tubbo felt a brief stab of disappointment, maybe he could have convinced Quackity to make a better deal if he didn't like Schlatt? It didn't matter now though.

"I'm Fundy." Fundy chimed in. He grinned at Tubbo. "We've met already!"

"You tried to kill me." Tubbo said. He definitely hadn't forgotten the fox already. Fundy just grinned wider, showing a lot of sharp teeth.

"Now, now. Nobody died and it's all good fun." Schlatt said. Tubbo rolled his eyes. Being attacked by hobgoblins was not his idea of good fun even before this whole issue started.

"You have your witnesses." He pointed out. It was time to finally get to working out the deal. Schlatt glanced back at Tubbo.

“Alright then, back to business.” Schlatt said. He steepled his fingers, smirking at Tubbo. “You’ll get a trial. If you succeed, you’ll get the Autumn charm.”

“And if I fail?” Tubbo said, ignoring the worry and dread churning in his stomach. That was something he wanted to negotiate as soon as possible. He really wanted the Autumn charm and Schlatt knew it.

Schlatt grin widened into something inhuman. “If you fail your trial, I will receive your full true Name.”

Tubbo wheezed, choking on air. No wonder Schlatt had wanted witnesses here! Receiving a person’s true Name gives you power over them, ranging based on how much of it one knew. With his full Name, Schlatt could turn Tubbo into a slave and he wouldn’t even be able to breathe a whisper of defiance. It was just about the steepest price one could request in a deal.

If he gave it to the Autumn King, the man would probably turn him into a slave or force him to go search for some magical artifact to sate the Fae’s greed. It’d be the end of the road for his quest. He wouldn’t be able to leave and complete his deal with Philza with Schlatt, the Winter King’s *ally*, being able to control him with a few words.

Knowing someone’s Name, even just the first, was something kept for one’s family. Sharing it was supposed to be a sacred moment, a sign of trust. Only Tommy knew his full Name and he knew Tommy’s. He didn’t want to change that.

“Absolutely not.” Tubbo said, his voice barely above a whisper.

“Nonnegotiable.” Schlatt said, tilting his head to the side. “Your Name will be forfeit to me if you fail. I’m not budging on this.”

“Don’t you want something else?” Tubbo prodded. He’d trade away years of his life or his ability to cry if it meant he got to keep his true Name.

“Don’t you want your friend back?” Schlatt countered. Tubbo wilted a little.

“Of course I do.” Tubbo snapped. He wanted nothing more than to get Tommy back. It was the entire reason he was sitting here right now.

“Then you’ll accept the price.” Schlatt said. He counted off on his fingers. “After all, you want this, the Winter Court will be angry if you somehow win, and the charm you’re getting is powerful magic. All of that deserves a high price. Name, or I’m not budging.”

Tubbo chewed his bottom lip, drumming his fingers on the table. Quackity and Fundy were both watching quietly, neither deigning to speak up. There was no way they’d cross their king, not in front of him.

“You can’t refuse to make a deal.” He said.

“I can, however, refuse an offer if the price doesn’t match what’s being wagered.” Schlatt said. He tilted his head as if thinking deeply. “If you really want an alternate... six months of every year must be spent in the Autumn Court.”

Tubbo recoiled. He wouldn't be able to survive six months in the Autumn Court. He'd go mad or be killed. Then the Winter Court would probably swoop in and find a loophole to steal Tommy back. He couldn't accept the alternative, even if it made him sick to think of wagering his Name.

And Schlatt knew it, judging by his sickening smirk.

"I've offered an alternative of equal value." Schlatt said peaceably. "The deal can't be made unless I agree and those are the offers on the table. No budging."

"Years of life?" Tubbo ventured. He hated the thought of bargaining with those but he could deal with the consequences.

"It would take more than even the longest human lifespan to make a good offer for this deal." Schlatt said. "Honestly kid, I'm cutting you a fair deal either way even if you don't think so. The badgering I'm gonna get from Wilbur alone for not tricking you into a price that'll kill you quick is enough to send it through the roof. Market's in flux and right now, value is high."

Tubbo let out a sigh, running a hand through his curls. Fey couldn't lie. Which meant Schlatt was honest about the years of his life, taking memories and personality traits off the table, both of which carried a lighter price.

Fey after all, measured prices not only in usefulness but in value to the person. A personality trait could be missed, memories longed for, but years of life could become a constant source of worry and regret for a person.

A Name however, carried the largest price of them all.

But it was his Name or spending half of every year in the grasp of the Autumn Court.

"Need something to drink while you make your decision?" Schlatt said, making a gesture with his hand. Quackity scowled at him.

"Not again." He grumbled. "You're the worst-" he said something that sounded like wind chimes and the crackle of lightning. Fundy snorted.

Schlatt glared at him. "Don't speak like that to me." He said. "If I want a drink, I want a drink."

Quackity rolled his eyes, pushing away from the table and disappearing through an archway behind his chair that hadn't been there before. Tubbo watched the archway for a moment before glancing at Schlatt.

Would he get a better price if the Fae was drunk? He usually could at market stalls, but did Fae even get drunk?

Schlatt caught his eye, grinning widely. "A drink could perk you right up." He said.

Tubbo flinched back as Quackity reached around him, placing an elaborate goblet in front of him. Against his better judgement, he leaned forward so he could see its contents. He expected wine as crimson as blood or shining like quicksilver. Something exotic and magical.

Instead, it looked like the hot chocolate he and Tommy made together, complete with a few marshmallows. A chocolatey smell began to fill the air, making his mouth water.

He swallowed slightly, looking up to see everyone's eyes on him. "I'm good." Tubbo said, pushing it away.

Quackity tsked behind him, stepping around to pass Schlatt his goblet. Schlatt didn't look away from Tubbo. "It'll make you feel better." He said, his eyes dark.

"By fogging my mind until I can't think of anything else." Tubbo finished. Fey food was dangerous stuff. Not just because of the implicit cost it carried but because of its potent effects. Fey wine could fog your mind and twist your memories until you drank yourself to death, thinking you had only had a sip.

"You're a kid, we'd stop you after one." Quackity said dismissively as he sat back down. Tubbo shuddered. Even if he somehow survived it, he'd be trapped in the Veil. "After all, Fundy's still not allowed more than two cups."

"Hey! I'm fully grown!" Fundy whined. Quackity and Schlatt didn't say a word, just looking at him. Tubbo snorted despite the knot of fear in his chest. "Screw you."

"Definitely not." Schlatt said. He drained his goblet in one swig, setting it back down. "Fine then. We'll make the deal without. Which would you prefer?"

"Neither."

"Not an option." Schlatt said. Tubbo flinched back as Schlatt swiped his goblet as well, ignoring Quackity's mumbled protests. "Look. Any other option I give will either kill you, reduce you to a husk, or would take so long to gather that you wouldn't make your deadline. And they don't even matter because I'm not even accepting anything else. Make your choice of what I give you. Your full true Name or you'll be staying here for six months every year."

Well. So much for smart bargaining. Schlatt held all the cards here and he knew it. Anger had failed, trickery had failed, and he didn't have much time to badger him. But Tubbo hated it anyway. Tubbo glared at him. "My true Name then." He said.

Schlatt's grin softened a bit. "Perfect." He purred. Tubbo shivered a bit at his tone. Quackity and Fundy were staring as well and it felt like they were boring holes into him. Only the person guarding the door was stone faced, the goggles meaning Tubbo couldn't see where his eyes rested. The man could be asleep and he would have no clue. "If you win, you'll get the Autumn charm needed for your deal with the Winter Court. If you lose, you'll give me your full true Name."

"I don't want any deadly interference either." Tubbo said, trying to lighten his sense of unease. "No cheating to make me lose and no trying to take back the charm when I win."

“When you win?”

“I’ll win.” Tubbo said. He ignored Fundy’s chuckling. “And I don’t want any Hunts after me while I’m doing the trial or afterwards.”

He wasn’t going to make the same mistake twice. He still held a bit of leverage here, Schlatt wouldn’t want him to find a loophole out of the forfeit.

“Fine.” Schlatt grumbled, not looking pleased. “I want this free and clear anyways. None of the Fey under my command will interfere with your deal or attempt to take back the charm *if* you win.”

“Or attack me.”

“Can’t promise that.” Schlatt said. He shrugged at Tubbo’s glare. “During the trial, those of my Court will refrain. But afterwards? That’s up in the air. If you want more, you have to wager more.”

“What more can I wager?” Tubbo said. He was already wagering his Name. Schlatt laughed.

“You’ll be surprised what I will buy.” Schlatt said, setting the goblet down. “Six months of the year is still on the table.”

Tubbo considered that. He was pretty sure that by staying on the path afterwards, he could leave relatively safely. The Autumn Court and the Summer Court weren’t allies so as long as he could get to the border, he would be safe for a while. “Fine. What will the trial be?”

Schlatt grinned. “Well, George here.” He waved at the guard who shifted slightly. “Spends a lot of time in the Summer Court.”

“Ambassador.” George said with the tone of someone who had repeated it many times.

“Is that what Dream calls his lovers?” Schlatt said. He chuckled as he looked back towards Tubbo, ignoring George’s grumble and Quackity’s soft, almost musical, reprimand in the other language. “Anyways, I figured he might miss that, you know? So your task is to find a green leaf for George within one of your human hours.”

“A green leaf?” Tubbo said doubtfully. He hadn’t seen any green leaves since entering Autumn territory.

“You know, from a tree.” Schlatt said, raising an eyebrow. Tubbo felt his face warm. “There are green leaves in my territory that you could find and bring back within the hour.”

“And you won’t speed up time or anything? Or slow me down?” Tubbo said. Those weren’t powers under the Winter Court but who knows what Schlatt could do to win? Schlatt put on an innocent look that he distrusted immediately.

“Time will pass as it would in your world.” He said. “And it begins as soon as you agree.”

Tubbo was silent for a long moment. The price would be steep if he lost. But the deal itself was likely the best he could negotiate in the short amount of time he had. Both Quackity and Fundy looked away when he glanced at them, leaving him unable to glean information from their faces.

“I agree to the deal then.” He ignored the shiver that went up his spine at Schlatt’s delighted smile. There wasn’t much that he could do other than win and escape.

“Get to finding, kid. I’ll see you in an hour.” He said. “When the hour is up, I’ll expect you here to present your findings.”

Tubbo jumped up and bolted outside, unwilling to waste even a moment. And then he staggered to a stop, gathering his bearings as his stomach lurched from the portal. He bent over slightly, breathing hard.

There was a quiet shuffle of leaves behind him. Tubbo looked up into the white goggles of George.

“You’ve already lost.” George said, perfectly poised unlike Tubbo’s more disoriented state. Tubbo narrowed his eyes, glaring at him.

“How so?” He asked. The deal wasn’t perfect but he had done his best. And Schlatt couldn’t lie, there had to be leaves he could collect.

What did George know that he didn’t?

George combed a hand through his hair, carefully avoiding the red with white spots and brown mushrooms that grew there. “He specified a green leaf for me.” Tubbo froze, feeling icy dread begin to pool in his chest. “I’m colorblind. I can’t see the color green.”

Chapter End Notes

Tubbo’s got high Intelligence, low Wisdom sometimes. He’s doing his best with what he knows and has heard from stories.

In his defense, he’s never heard a story quite like his and Tommy’s.

Viridian Leaves

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning for this chapter: Near panic attack in the beginning, emotional manipulation at the end.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tubbo stared at George mutely for a moment. Several questions rose to the top of his tongue but ultimately fell away. All the plans he created turned to ashes.

“For George.” He said quietly. Schlatt had smiled when he said that. And foolishly, Tubbo had taken it for arrogance.

For George.

Those two words changed the entire deal. The parameters weren’t a green leaf, but a green leaf for George. But George couldn’t see green leaves, ergo, there was no such thing as green leaves for George. Tubbo buried his head in his hands, tugging at his curls. He had no idea how to solve the riddle.

But he needed to, had to, for-

His chest burned and distantly, he could tell he wasn’t breathing right, his breath too fast. But he couldn’t stop, his control over himself was slipping away.

C’mon big man, count backwards from ten-

Tubbo wheezed. He couldn’t- he couldn’t count. Tommy was supposed to be the one counting. It didn’t work without him. It felt like his lungs were about to tear their way out of his chest.

Gloved hands gently untangled his hands, pulling them away. “None of that.” George said. “That gets you nowhere. Schlatt will be a pain if he finds out you tore out your hair and I let you.”

Tubbo let out a semi hysterical giggle and then coughed. “I’d look great bald anyways.” He said, his voice a weak whisper. George’s emotionless shades stared back at him.

“Sure you would.” George said. Tubbo pulled his hands away, taking a deep gulp of air and trying to focus again.

10, 9, 8-

He sniffled a bit, rubbing at his face with one palm. A soft breeze helped dry his tears quickly, but they kept coming.

7, 6, 5-

Tommy would never tell him to count like that again if he didn't get him back.

4, 3, 2-

Maybe he had rescheduled his panic attack just a bit too much. But he'd have to reschedule it again.

1

"You can't see the color green? At all?" Tubbo asked, staring at the leaves. Red, orange, yellow, even the crimson of Schlatt's tree. No green. But did that matter? Would it count if George couldn't see it?

"Green looks like yellow to me." George said with a shrug. "Dream finds it hilarious. Well, except when I call him out for his clothing choices."

"Right." Tubbo said, not quite sure how to answer that last bit. Clothing choices. Whatever. Tubbo wouldn't judge, he didn't have color blindness and he still called Tommy out for his love of one particular shirt. "Is there a way you can see green?"

"I dunno?" George said. He reached up, scratching one ear. This close, his skin didn't quite look human like. Tubbo looked down again, trying to forget the way it seemed more like tree bark before his panic resurfaced. "Dream's poked around for information and I've done some adventuring with Sapnap. But there aren't any artifacts that can correct it."

"But that doesn't mean they can't be made." Tubbo pressed, scrambling for a nearby stick and brushing a clear patch onto the ground. "The problem is in your eyes right? So if we can get some materials together, maybe some healing, a few of the more intense colors that border on magical, even a simple glamour spell mixed in to encourage the eyes to see with the glasses instead of simply through them. Probably would have to be in the shape of a pair of glasses, I'm guessing your goggles are already enchanted, yeah? So it'd be additional--"

He blinked, looking at the design he had been drawing on the ground. "Of course, I have no idea if any of this would work." Tubbo said, groaning and tossing the stick aside. Purpled might know but it would be a long trip there and back.

"No, I can see it." George said. He crouched down, examining the drawing. "Honestly it might just work. You part Fae or something?"

"What?"

"You have a deft mind for magic." George said, looking up at him. Tubbo shook his head quickly.

“Definitely not.” He said. This wasn’t really magic, it was just babbling. Bits and pieces of possibility pinned together from the stories he remembered. There was no Fey stealing away a child and leaving him in its stead, no dramatic love affair bridging two worlds between his parents.

He was just normal Tubbo.

“Huh.” George said. “Potential then. Well, I think this could work. I can even think of some of the stuff you could use for it. Problem is, it’s gonna take you a lot longer than a hour to collect it and put it together.”

“And that’s saying if it works on the first try.” Tubbo said, frowning at the design. Well, it had been a good conjecture at least. And he was feeling much calmer now.

“If you end up losing this, I’ll be interested in seeing if we can put this together.” George said. He shrugged. “Or maybe if we’re in the Summer Court at the same time.”

Tubbo frowned at him. “What do you mean ‘if I end up losing this’?” He asked.

Normally he’d chalk that up to becoming a servant if he lost. Of course George would get him to assist if he was a servant. But there was something different about the way George said it.

Less derogatory and more... friendly? Equal? He couldn’t put his finger on it. It just sounded wrong.

“You haven’t figured it out yet?” George said, one eyebrow raised. As if Tubbo was a fool for not noticing sooner.

“You’ve already told me about the color blindness thing.” Tubbo said, half to George and half to himself. There shouldn’t be anything left to figure out but his current trial. “And the Autumn Fey are forbidden from interfering right now.”

“They are.” George said. “If you get distracted, that’s your own business.”

“Are you distracting me then?” Tubbo said, taking a wary step down the path. It would make sense if that offhand comment was a red herring. Something thrown out to confuse and concern him.

“Am I?” George said. Tubbo glared at him. George tilted his head to the side. “Have you really not realized why Schlatt would ask you for your Name?”

“Because it gives him power over me?” Tubbo said. He felt like he was frozen in place, watching Technoblade coming closer and closer. That slow building of dread and anticipation that was becoming far too familiar.

“No.” George said, smiling and leaning in close. He smelled like dirt and decay. “Because knowing a person’s name makes you *family*.”

And at that, he turned and disappeared into the trees.

Tubbo stared, frozen in mute shock for a moment. “What does that mean?” He said, voice just above a squeak.

There was no answer but the breeze rustling through the leaves.

Slowly, mechanically, Tubbo turned and began to walk along the path. Trying to chase out the paranoia with the burn of exercise and the steady crunch of his footsteps in the leaves.

But it wouldn’t go away. It dogged his steps. He sped up to a jog. *Family*. Why would George say that? Was it to distract him like he said?

But Tubbo couldn’t just dismiss it as a distraction. It felt so... so true? He tried to go through the evidence methodically to discount it but the evidence kept going towards the other side.

Schlatt had intervened in Fundy’s chat. He had given Tubbo his jacket, the very same one he was wearing right now, with no strings attached. He guided Tubbo to a chair directly next to him that had clearly been meant for someone who wasn’t some random dirty human orphan. The constant weird looks and smiling.

The odd feeling-

Tubbo twisted the hem of the jacket in his hands as he jogged, trying to keep his breathing steady. There had to be a good explanation for this. A better one.

He just couldn’t think of it. But he’d figure it out. He always did. Right?

Tubbo screamed when a warm hand wrapped around his arm. He twisted like a snake, slamming his hands into the person’s chest and pushing them to the ground.

He took a deep shuddering breath, skittering back.

For a moment, he was terrified it was Schlatt coming to tell him that time was up. And then the golden feathers registered. Quackity looked at him, anger briefly bubbling to the surface before suddenly fading away.

Still, Tubbo felt his breathing quicken again.

The name Quackity wasn’t familiar, but the golden feathers were. Gamblers fleeing debtors would whisper about wagers with a devil who had golden feathers. Wagers that always backfired, tying someone in an inescapable web of their own making.

“Kind of twitchy, aren’t we?” Quackity said, standing and brushing off his pristine suit. The Fae’s eyes went to the path below their feet and Tubbo felt himself relax a bit. Quackity couldn’t claim a debt for being pushed.

“You’re the one who snuck up on me.” Tubbo defended. He stepped around a tree in front of him, noting with a little embarrassment how close it was. Annoyingly, Quackity was practically right on his heels.

“You were about to walk into a tree.” Quackity said, smirking at him. Tubbo glared at him in stubborn refusal making him shake his head and mutter a few words in that musical language.

“What is that?” Tubbo said. Quackity quirked an eyebrow at him.

“What’s what? You gotta be more obvious.” Quackity said. “I ain’t Schlatt, I don’t do complicated metaphors.”

Tubbo turned and stared at him for a long moment. Quackity beamed at him. “That’s definitely a lie.” Tubbo said. “Or at least a very generous leap from truth.”

Quackity snickered and Tubbo yelped as he was gently smacked by one wing. “Haven’t you learned to respect your elders, dude? Humans still talk about that, right?”

“Yeah, just point me to some elders who deserve my respect.” Tubbo snarked. Quackity burst in a full on cackling fit and Tubbo nearly stumbled in surprise. The Fae shook his head, wiping away a tear.

“Ah, that was pretty good!” He said. “Maybe Schlatt is finally back to making good choices. I always kind of knew he had it in him! Even if he’s a-”

Tubbo stiffened, interrupting Quackity. “Good choices?”

“What you’re hearing is the Fae language.” Quackity continued like he didn’t hear Tubbo. But Tubbo knew he had heard by the way the man side eyed him. There was a glint in his eyes like he was excited to see Tubbo’s annoyance. “But I’m speaking a specific dialect so it sounds different. Schlatt knows it too, but only the cuss words because that’s what I’ve been teaching him whenever he asks for phrases.”

“No, back up.” Tubbo said. As much as he wanted to hear about the Fey language and dialects, Quackity had said something weird. “What do you mean about ‘good choices’?”

“Oh, you’re one of those ones.” Quackity mused, staring at Tubbo. “See, it kind of ruins my fun if I tell you.”

“I don’t care about your fun!” Tubbo yelled, clenching his fists. Would the path protect him if he punched Quackity right now? This had to count as provocation. “I want to know what you’re talking about!”

He needed confirmation. That this wasn’t what he thought it was.

Quackity stared at him for a long moment, the only sign of annoyance being his slightly ruffled feathers. “No.” He said. “You know what’s going on. You just want to hear it said out loud.”

“Then say it.” Tubbo hissed. He was tired of the weird mind games. It was a little fun at first but now they grated on his nerves.

“What wager will you off-“

“Go away.” Tubbo yelled. It was less of a yell and more a shriek bordering on the edge of hysterical. “I’m not gonna sit here and make a deal or wager or gamble or whatever you want to call it.”

There was a soft snicker. “Long day?” Quackity said. Tubbo made an incoherent hissing noise, speeding up. “Fine, I’ll back off. You try to settle yourself a bit. I’m always available if you need to talk. I think we’re gonna become great friends. Practically family!”

And then he disappeared in the trees because apparently every Autumn Fey had to do that. Tubbo turned, bolting down the path. Maybe if he ran fast enough, he could outrun the memory of the conversation.

It had been stupid to yell at him, but he was tired. Most of his brain space was going to the information he was grappling with and the other part towards the quests he was completing.

He just... needed a few minutes. A few minutes without another Fae popping up where he could just breathe. Or maybe an hour. An hour of solitude sounded really nice right now.

But no, no solitude for Tubbo because he had to find this stupid green leaf. Or whatever would fit the terms of the deal he had. He let out an annoyed sigh, slowing to a walk and stomping extra hard through the leaves. The faster he could do this, the faster he could leave and then the question wouldn’t matter anymore.

Okay. Game plan. He’d try to find a normal green leaf first. Then he could figure out how to spin it to get around George’s colorblindness. Tubbo looked up, surveying the canopy. He really doubted a green leaf would be on a convenient branch right within reach.

But that means if he went high enough, he could possibly see it.

Tubbo eyed a nearby tree trunk in consideration. It looked exactly like the trees he and Tommy would climb back home. There was plenty of handholds to use.

The only problem was that all of the trees were off the path.

Tubbo swallowed hard, glancing down and then up again. Part of his deal was that the Autumn Fey wouldn’t attack him so climbing the tree shouldn’t do anything. But he had been so careful about staying on the path that it just felt wrong to leave it.

On the other hand though, climbing one of their trees might be a rude act. And he felt up to being a little rude right now. Tubbo snickered under his breath before squaring his shoulders and stepping off the path.

Nothing happened. No curses, no Fey appearing. Just the crunch of leaves underfoot and the quiet rustle of the breeze through tree branches.

Alright, he wasn’t dead yet. Time for step two. Tubbo hopped up, catching a low branch and twisting to throw his leg over it. He pressed down, gasping a bit at the burning feeling as he slowly pulled himself up on top of the branch.

He laid there for a moment, feeling the rough tree bark through his shirt. Another moment to steady himself. And then he pushed up, wincing at how the branch bounced when he reached for the next handhold.

Don't look down, Tubbo chanted silently as he pulled himself up a little bit further. Don't look down and it will be fine. Maybe it was a bit silly after his slide down the ravine but Tubbo didn't like heights. If he looked down, it might split his already fractured attention more.

He gritted his teeth, pulling himself a little bit higher. He had to twist himself awkwardly to get to the next branch as it grew on a different side compared to most of the branches.

So far, the tree hadn't thrown him to the ground or cursed him for being impudent. And now, he was just seconds away from success. Tubbo grinned, tilting his head up. Overhead, he could see light filtering through.

"Finally." Tubbo said, feeling his muscles burn as he dug his fingers into the bark. By now, the branches were beginning to shake under his weight.

Excruciatingly slowly, he pushed himself up on the light, pressing against the trunk to keep himself steady.

The sky was an odd lavender color, contrasting strangely against the autumnal trees. There were no clouds and no sun, and yet the area was lit up as if it was the middle of the day. It was a beautiful scene, one right out of a painting.

"How far did I walk?" Tubbo muttered to himself, brow furrowing. The warm colors of autumn stretched as far as he could see.

He inched his hands further apart on the rough bark so he could twist to scan the trees for a hint of green. Something green should stand out against the browns and other autumnal colors, right?

But there was nothing. Not even the tiniest hint of green.

For a moment, his heart did a funny little swoop. Did Schlatt twist his words? Were there really green leaves he could collect?

Tubbo chewed on his bottom lip. He should still have more time. It might be close but he could head away from here and climb another tree. He'd just scan the area one more time. He shifted, feeling the branch dip beneath his feet again.

Please let this work. Please.

There.

Tubbo grinned. Almost hidden in a faraway tree was a tiny cluster of green. It was far enough away that he had almost missed it, as indistinct as it was. He leaned forward a bit, trying to make it out better. There was a soft creaking sound underfoot and Tubbo frowned, glancing down. He didn't like the sound of that.

Maybe he should get down first and then go see it?

Slowly, he began to crouch, readying himself for the climb back down. The branch creaked again. There was a sharp popping sound.

And then he was f a l l i n g.

Tubbo let out a strangled shriek that was snatched away by the rushing air. His shoulder slammed into a branch and it cut off to a strangled sound of agony. His suddenly numb hands slid off the branch before he could get a hold, sending him tumbling through the air again. Leaves whipped past his face, blinding him.

No more branches below him, nothing but a long fall to the ground-

They say your life would flash before your eyes when you're about to die. Tubbo's second to last thought was a hysterical *Technoblade's gonna be pissed a tree got me before he could*.

He squeezed his eyes shut, waiting for impact. His last thought was *I'm sorry Tommy. I tried my best*.

There was an odd twisting sensation in his stomach and Tubbo let out a soft groan. It felt like he had gone through the portal again. The sound of rushing air fell away.

Death felt oddly warm.

And then Tubbo shifted his shoulder slightly and *ow no death should not hurt like that*. It felt like someone had taken a hammer to his right shoulder.

"Don't move too much." Someone said above him. "You humans are pretty fragile. That was a stupid thing you just did."

Well, he didn't think mysterious voices talked to you when you're dead. Tubbo opened his eyes, blinking against the light. Slowly, the face above him swam back into focus.

And Tubbo recoiled. "Schlatt." He said, trying to scramble away. He was lying practically in the man's lap, head tucked against his chest and Schlatt's arms wrapped around him. His shoulder flared with agony and Tubbo let out a gasp of pain, sinking back into Schlatt's hold.

More evidence for his hypothesis, he thought numbly. He just didn't want to think of whether it was for or against.

"Stop moving, you're just going to hurt yourself." Schlatt said. It sounded almost parental, the way he said it. Like Tubbo was a little kid who had fallen down and scraped his knee.

What wasn't parental was how he shifted his hold to cage Tubbo in with one arm, brushing his other hand over Tubbo's injured shoulder.

Tubbo let out a strangled noise, surging up to headbutt Schlatt. There was a satisfying crack and the hand fell away. He had to admit, he felt a little smug at the shocked look on Schlatt's face. Terrified, but smug.

He had been wanting to hit someone for ages.

Unexpectedly, Schlatt grinned. “Nice headbutt, kid.” He said. Tubbo flinched as the free hand combed through his curls. “You’re like a little goat.”

Huh, Tubbo thought distantly. A baby goat is called a kid. A friendly farmer had told him that during their haggling while Tommy was trying to pet one.

“Let me go.” Tubbo said, wriggling in Schlatt’s hold. It was humiliating how Schlatt could cage him in with one arm on his lap like he was a little kid throwing a tantrum.

“You’re just going to get more injured if I do.” Schlatt said. “You don’t have any wings and yet you climbed a tree. It’s like you were searching for death. If it wasn’t for my protection, you would have fallen to your death or been picked off by another one of the Fey.”

There was a certain inflection on how he said protection. Like how George said they might meet later and Quackity said that Schlatt made a good choice. But what Tubbo got stuck on was how fast Schlatt had gotten here. Last he knew, the king was back in his throne room.

“You were watching me.” Tubbo said. A breeze stirred around them, kicking up leaves. It had been strangely breezy as he walked and foolishly, he hadn’t thought it strange. “That’s how you caught me.”

“I’m pretty sure you alerted half the forest with your shriek.” Schlatt said, scratching his stubbled chin. “And I was on my way over anyway. Quackity told me you had a question and I thought I’d be the one to answer.”

Tubbo didn’t want to talk about this. He wanted to bury his head in the sand and live in blissful ignorance. Fey? What are those? He wanted to be back home, sitting in his chair and telling Tommy a ghost story while the other bragged about his own storytelling skills. Stories and rumors never talked about this.

But his curiosity was burning inside of him. He couldn’t let his paranoia keep distracting his thoughts and clouding his plans.

“Let me go.” Tubbo whispered, pushing against Schlatt’s chest. He couldn’t talk like this.

“What was that?” Schlatt said, tilting his head to the side. There was a smug glint in his eyes. “I didn’t hear you.”

Tubbo growled, surging up. Schlatt let out a muffled curse, pushing Tubbo’s head away just before it slammed into his nose. He felt a flare of disappointment at being blocked this time.

Was Tubbo a bit too high on adrenaline? Maybe. He swayed slightly, pain and exhaustion starting to drag at him. Maybe trying to headbutt Schlatt again had been a bad idea. Maybe.

Schlatt raised an eyebrow, shifting his hold slightly. “Was that necessary, kid?” He complained. “Now my suit is stained. Grass stains are a bitch to get out, kid.”

“I’m not a kid.” Tubbo said, his voice hollow. Schlatt rolled his eyes. He had gotten a new suit jacket since Tubbo last saw him. It looked absolutely pristine, exactly like the one still draped on Tubbo’s small frame. “I’m seventeen. Old enough to go to war and to start my own family if I wanted to.”

“Fey live for centuries.” Schlatt countered. “You’re nothing but a tiny little child to most of us. A little kid stumbling around and pretending to be grown up.”

Oh. Tubbo thought distantly. His theory was right.

“That doesn’t mean you can adopt me.” He said, his head dropping to press into Schlatt’s suit. The man was unfairly comfortable.

“Why not?” Schlatt said. There it was, an out loud confirmation. Tubbo had been right but he couldn’t find it in himself to be satisfied. His hand pressed into the back of Tubbo’s neck, rubbing soothing circles. “Why are you against this?”

“Because I’m human!” Tubbo protested. He couldn’t give up his own mortality like it meant nothing. “And I have to help Tommy escape. I can’t leave him there.”

“We’ll table the Tommy issue for a moment.” Schlatt said. Tubbo hissed at him. Tommy wasn’t an issue! “Why would you want to stay human? You’ll be a prince Tubbo. Happy and cared for, the very power of autumn at your fingertips. How could being mortal be better than that?”

“He would be adored as my son and as a younger brother, given anything he could desire. Eternally young, eternally happy. Aren’t you his friend? Shouldn’t you want to see him happy?”

“I-“

“You’d fit in so well.” Schlatt said, hand shifting to brush Tubbo’s curls out of his eyes. Tubbo just stared at him mutely. His limbs felt too heavy to move, each gentle touch sending sparks of warmth through his body, slowly pulling his tired mind into a drowsy state.

Fey can’t lie, a traitorous voice whispered in his mind. *He’s telling the truth right now.*

He tried to shake the thought away, his brunet curls flopping back into his eyes. “I’m not like you.” He denied.

“Aren’t you?” Schlatt said, a dark glint in his eyes. Tubbo’s heart was beating against his ribs like a trapped bird. “All throughout your journey, you’ve manipulated other people for your own ends. Picked at any weakness you can find and twisted their emotions for your advantage. You wouldn’t just survive, you’d *thrive* as one of us.”

No. No, that’s not what he did. He- he haggled and made plans, yes, but he wasn’t like the Fey. Not like Schlatt. He didn’t want to hurt anyone. He just wanted Tommy back.

But he couldn’t say that. It felt like the words were caught in his throat.

Schlatt grabbed his chin, tilting it back so Tubbo was looking him in the eye. “You’re as selfish as any Fey. You keep your friend from immortality and royalty because you’re afraid of them leaving you. But they don’t have to leave you.”

“If Philza takes him, I’ll never see him again.” Tubbo said. There was a Hunt after his head. If he stepped foot in Winter territory, he was as good as dead.

“If you become the prince of the Autumn Court, my son, you can keep your friend. I’m sure Philza would be delighted to arrange playdates for you two.” Schlatt coaxed. “Wouldn’t you like that?”

And Tubbo tried, he really tried, but he couldn’t stop himself from imagining. What it would feel like to not be afraid again. To play amongst the autumnal groves with Tommy at his side or explore the snowy mountain.

To have a father.

Oh. That was the odd feeling in his chest, the desire Schlatt had brought out. It felt like even his own mind was betraying him, wanting this when he needed to save Tommy.

His hands rustled through the leaves on the ground, blindly reaching for something to cling onto. To hold himself steady as Schlatt broke down the walls he had built. All he came up with was a handful of dried leaves.

“Let go.” Tubbo squeaked. His voice sounded pathetic even to his own ears. It was hard to concentrate with Schlatt’s golden ram-like eyes staring into his.

“Become my son.” Schlatt said. His thumb stroked along Tubbo’s jaw, a twisted gesture of affection. “My clever little goat kid. Everyone’s excited to fully meet you. Quackity has been wanting me to settle down for years and Fundy is thrilled at the prospect of not being the youngest of the Court anymore. But I never found anyone I liked until I met you.”

“People will miss me.” But as soon as he said it, Tubbo knows he’s wrong. Any family he had had died a long time ago, leaving him an orphan. For all of their shenanigans, he and Tommy had drifted through the village like ghosts. At best, a cautionary tale, at worst, forgotten. Purpled and Ranboo had known him for all of an hour, at best. “I’ll miss them.”

“What have humans ever done for you? Tossed you into an orphanage and then pushed you into the streets as soon as possible.” Schlatt said, brutally honest. His grip tightened, stopping Tubbo from flinching away. “You won’t remember them. You won’t need to remember them. Your days of being a human will be nothing more than a blur.”

And those words splashed ice cold water down Tubbo’s spine.

The offer was tantalizing. So, so tantalizing. He had never expected to meet someone other than Tommy who saw him, all of him, and wanted that. Wanted the paranoid boy who lied as easily as breathing.

But on the other hand.

"This isn't better! What you're doing, he's not really Tommy anymore!"

Would he really be Tubbo if he forgot everything? Or would he just be the prince of the Autumn Court, the child they wanted?

Tubbo squeezed his eyes shut. And for a brief moment, considered a world where he said yes. Where he hugged Schlatt back and chose to stay. Where he left the path and forgot the quest and the pain it would bring.

Forgot all the cold nights and uncaring faces. All the times people walked past him at the orphanage. Forgot losing his family. He wouldn't miss those memories.

But he'd miss the nights where he and Tommy had huddled together and made up stories. All the times he and Tommy had pranked villagers and nearly got caught because they were laughing too hard. The day he and Tommy had first met.

Schlatt called Tubbo selfish. And maybe he was. Maybe he was just as selfish and terrible as the Fey.

Tubbo didn't think that it was a bad thing to be a little selfish.

There was a soft chiming sound. "Unless you have a leaf to show me." Schlatt said, a thread of triumph to his voice. "That means I win."

"No." Tubbo said. His hand tightened on what he had found. "It means you lose."

Chapter End Notes

Can you guys tell I like cliffhangers? Because I do. :)

I'm offering a trade

You got: Dark dad Schlatt

I get: Comments and kudos please? I love reading what you guys think.

Golden Leaves

Chapter Notes

I love how I've apparently made some people paranoid of the Fey.

Good. Wariness of the Fey is important. :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Schlatt's grip tightened. "Repeat that."

Tubbo refused to be daunted by his dark tone. "I said you lost." He said. He tilted his head back, meeting Schlatt's gaze. "Thank you. I wouldn't have been able to figure it out without your help."

"And what help would that be?" Schlatt said. His gaze dropped to what Tubbo was holding and Tubbo felt a thrill of exhilaration. He finally had the upper hand against Schlatt. "I know this forest like the back of my hand. What you're holding there isn't a green leaf and there's no green leaves for miles around."

"Isn't it?" Tubbo said. He opened his hand, admiring the leaf. It was a perfect golden color, unmarred by dark spots or imperfections. It felt as light as a feather in his hand.

"Are you colorblind?" Schlatt asked. Tubbo made an involuntary noise as his head was tilted to the side so Schlatt could check. "I asked for a green leaf."

"Colorblind? I'm not. But George is." Tubbo said. He braced himself for what he was going to say next. He knew it was right and yet. "You sent him to me on purpose."

"George sought you out by himself." Schlatt said with a shrug. "He may act as a guard but his ambassador position means he has some annoying personal freedoms."

"With encouragement from you." Tubbo said. He turned the leaf over in his hand, trying to keep his breathing steady. "Or maybe not. But it served your purpose didn't it? The color blindness fact didn't just destroy my plans, it shook me badly."

Normally, he would have been able to come up with a plan much faster. But between the barely averted panic attack while talking to George and the brief chat with Quackity, he had been completely thrown off.

He hadn't caught it at first because it made no sense. Why would they give him that help, even if it provided a complicated riddle?

It only made sense after he had accepted what Schlatt wanted. Help, for a trade off. He very nearly cracked under the pressure and seriously considered Schlatt's offer.

"And?" Schlatt said. "It's not my fault humans can be fragile."

There was an invitation there that Tubbo refused to acknowledge for his own sanity. "And conveniently before I could think of something, Quackity arrived." He said. "Honestly, I'm shocked you didn't send Fundy."

"Fundy is the welcome crew." Schlatt replied. Not quite denial but not quite acknowledgement either. But by the way a frown had settled on his face, Tubbo knew he could tell where this was going.

"George sees yellow instead of green." Tubbo said, tilting his chin up and out of Schlatt's hand. "Ergo, this yellow leaf is green for him. You didn't say a green leaf, you said a green leaf for George. This is what a green leaf is for George. Just a simple yellow leaf. Nothing more."

"That's your logic." Schlatt said. His free hand settled on Tubbo's arm, just below his throbbing shoulder. "That because of his color blindness, a yellow leaf is green?"

"And I'm right." Tubbo said stubbornly. "Because otherwise, you would have demanded my name already."

It had been such a simple elegant solution, he thought, twirling the leaf's stem between his fingers. George had practically told him the solution at the start. He had over thought the solution the entire time, certain it had to be more complicated.

How deviously clever, to simplify the solution instead of over complicating it. A riddle designed to trap someone with a habit of overthinking, to crush them with their insecurities. How much did Schlatt learn from their conversation?

He looked back up. Schlatt's dark look had returned tenfold, the friendly demeanor falling away. He couldn't falter now. "I win."

"You did." Schlatt said after a moment, a slight softening to his frown. "Good job, kid."

He plucked the golden leaf out of Tubbo's hand, making Tubbo flinch back slightly before leaning forward to watch. The leaf began to shrink, becoming glossier and more rigid.

After a moment, the Autumn charm was laying in Schlatt's hand.

Tubbo felt his breath hitch. He had *won*. He had outmaneuvered the king of the Autumn Court. He was one step closer to freeing Tommy.

He reached forward, ready to snatch it up and add it to his bracelet. But it was pulled quickly out of his grasp.

"You don't need to take it." Schlatt said. Some of the cold anger had slipped out of his voice. It almost sounded... pleading. "You can win the deal but still become my son. You can even

keep the charm.”

Tubbo swallowed hard. “No.” He said softly. “It’s a very tempting offer. But I have a best friend waiting for me to save him.”

With a clicking sound, the charm slipped onto his bracelet. Tubbo breathed a sigh of relief, tilting his wrist to see the charms move. He took a deep breath, not quite sure what to say but knowing he had to say something.

And then let out a startled scream as he was pushed to the ground, Schlatt pinning his arms.

Schlatt loomed over him, his golden eyes burning. The wind whipped around them, kicking up leaves until they were in their own autumnal blizzard.

“You’re saying no.” He said. “Becoming the prince of the Autumn Court, my son, and you’re saying no. So, you can stay a pathetic human and try to keep your friend a pathetic human as well.”

“Yes.” Tubbo whispered. There was nothing else he could say.

“And you think I’ll just let you go.” Schlatt hissed. Tubbo let out a soft pained sound as the grip on his wrists tightened.

“No hunts.” He said, gasping slightly. “No interference.”

“That was during the trial.” Schlatt growled. “And did you really think that would save you? For a single favor from me, there are mercenaries who would hunt you down in my name. The Winter Court wants you out of the way one way or another.”

Tubbo gritted his teeth. He couldn’t refute that. He wouldn’t be surprised if Wilbur had written that letter aiming for this outcome.

“I’ll fight you.” He swore. He wouldn’t let Schlatt take him without a fight, no matter how tempting it was. “I’ll kick, I’ll scream, I’ll run at any chance. Good luck making me agree.”

“How naive you are.” Schlatt whispered. Tubbo gasped as the grip on his arms suddenly released. “Go on then. Run.”

“What?” Tubbo said.

Schlatt sat back, freeing Tubbo. He would look bored if it wasn’t for the dark look in his eyes. “I’ll give you a head start, let you get it out of your system.” He said. “You’ll find it’s hopeless soon enough. If not, a long nap in a tree will settle you.”

Tubbo froze. He had heard of the Autumn Court trapping people in trees. Much like the Winter Court’s statues, it was seen as a fate worse than death.

Schlatt tapped the tip of his nose. “Don’t look like that, kid.” He said, smug. “It won’t be too bad for you. I want you agreeable, not insane.”

Never, Tubbo wanted to say. But he could tell the Fae's eyes were deadly serious. He sat up slowly, bracing himself under Schlatt's gaze in case the Fae decided to take it back.

"Now." Schlatt said, leaning in close. "Run."

Tubbo leaped to his feet, turning and bolting down the path like a startled deer. He could hear Schlatt's refined chuckles, tinted with a hint of madness, carried by the breeze.

His feet hit the ground in a steady rhythm, contrasted by his racing mind. There had to be a way out of here. Schlatt wouldn't have issued the pseudo challenge if Tubbo couldn't keep continuing what the Fae thought was a hopeless quest.

But, Tubbo thought, he hadn't expected this... twisted desire for adoption either. He had no idea how to predict what Schlatt would do next. And the thought of that terrified him. This entire situation terrified him.

His right shoulder had slowly started to go numb, probably not a fantastic change. He needed to check it over but he was terrified of slowing down. Of Schlatt swooping in and locking him inside a tree until he agreed.

But running headlong into the trees wouldn't help find a way out either.

Tubbo slowed, hand going towards the pocket that held his compass. After a moment, he pulled his hand away. He didn't want to risk Schlatt stealing or destroying it to crush him further.

Should he try climbing a tree again? Tubbo winced, thinking of his shoulder. He risked crippling himself permanently trying.

Then, what now?

Unless-

It was a terrible idea. Monumentally stupid. Tommy would call him a moron if he was here. Tubbo stopped, left arm wrapping around himself. But it was the only idea he had for the moment other than running and hoping he found the border before Schlatt got bored.

"Quackity?" He said to the silent forest. "I want to make a deal."

For a moment, there was silence and Tubbo wondered if he had been wrong. Maybe Quackity was back in the throne room or his house, laughing it up.

A twig snapped and Tubbo took a wary step back as Quackity stepped around the tree in front of him.

The winged advisor looked amused, folding his arms. "Hey kid, long time no see." He asked. "I heard you wanted to make a deal?"

Tubbo had considered Fundy at first, thinking he might be more inexperienced. But eventually he decided that out of the two, Quackity was the one more likely to actually make

the deal.

After all, Quackity was known to make deals with the desperate.

“Yes.” Tubbo said. He cleared his throat. “I want to make a deal for safe passage to the summer court.”

“Eh, I don’t know, kid.” Quackity said, adjusting his beanie. “Schlatt would be kind of mad if I made this easy on you. And I’m kind of curious to see where this will go.”

“I’m not.” Tubbo said. “And if he wanted to put me to sleep or whatever, he would have done it back there. Don’t you have anything in mind that you’d want in exchange?”

Quackity rubbed his chin, drawing out the moment. “Well.” He drawled. “There might be something you can do for me.”

“And what would that be?” Tubbo said. He was really hoping it would be something reasonable. Every second he spent here was one second closer to getting drawn back into Schlatt’s web.

“Aw, don’t be like that!” Quackity said, grinning at him. Tubbo stuck his tongue out of him. “Fine, fine, I’ll cut to the juicy bit. See, I’ve got a... you can call him a beau of sorts in the Summer Court. But because Schlatt sucks, I can’t visit often.”

“And?” Tubbo prompted. It better not be something like climbing a tree.

“I just want you to deliver a letter.” Quackity said brightly. He reached into his jacket, pulling out a golden envelope. “Don’t humans still use letters?”

“Yeah?” Tubbo said. He’d never gotten one but he knew people sent letters. “This isn’t a trap, is it? Like coded attack instructions.”

Quackity snorted. “I mean, he’s pretty wild so he might attack you.” He said. “But why would I waste that kinda space on you?”

“Strangely hurtful but reassuring.” Tubbo said, staring at Quackity. “Who’s the letter for then?”

“I’m not telling you!”

“What kind of little kid antics is that?” Tubbo said, confused. “How am I going to deliver the letter then?”

“Guess!” Quackity said. “See, I can’t make this too easy for you. You’ve gotta guess who my lively partner is and deliver the letter. Better pick the right person, I wouldn’t be surprised if the others would destroy it. And let’s just say, I’m gonna be real mad if my letter gets destroyed.”

Well, that was a jerk move. But Tubbo kept that to himself, not wanting to risk the deal. “And in return for safely delivering the letter, you’ll safely guide me to the border?”

“Absolutely.” Quackity said. His hand reached towards his jacket and Tubbo froze. Would Quackity betray him? “In fact, I’ll heal your shoulder as well. You’ll just have to deliver a second letter to my other special someone in the Spring Court.”

Tubbo froze, eyeing Quackity. How many sweethearts did this guy have? The second letter was an odd mix of purple and green, different from the golden color of the first. “In exchange for delivering both letters, right?” He said. It didn’t escape him that Quackity hadn’t explicitly said it would be in exchange.

Quackity grinned at him. “Healing for your shoulder and safe passage for the delivery of this letter.” He said. “What do you say?”

Tubbo mulled it over for a moment. There was still some room for error. He had no idea who the recipients were or what was in the letters. “Are there any other conditions?” He asked. Quackity chuckled, shaking his head.

“You’re a smart kid.” Quackity said, his tone rueful. “Are you sure you don’t want to accept Schlatt’s offer? We could have lots of fun terrorizing him.”

Not for the first time, Tubbo wondered what exactly Schlatt had done to make Quackity so irritable at him. “No.” He said. “Any other conditions?”

Quackity sighed. “You may not open the letter under any circumstances. And if you do open it, damage it, or deliver it to the wrong person, then I will deliver you to Schlatt myself.”

Tubbo shivered a bit. “Alright then. I’ll accept the deal.” He said. What other choice did he have? He nearly flinched away when Quackity stepped closer. “What are you doing?”

“Here.” Quackity said. In his hands were the envelopes. Tubbo reached out, snatching them quickly. They were fancy envelopes with thick almost velvety paper with some weight to it. The kind he used to see in fancy shop windows in large towns. Carefully, Tubbo tucked them into one of the suit jacket’s many pockets, worried his dusty hands might stain them.

When he looked back up, Quackity was much closer than before. Tubbo jerked back with a squeak.

“Relax. It’s easier to heal you if I’m touching you.” Quackity said with a shrug. “Hold still. I don’t want to shuffle around your bones or something.”

Tubbo forced himself to remain still as Quackity’s fingertips drifted across his injured shoulder. Quackity whistled. “You did a number on yourself.” He said.

“I got in a fight with gravity and gravity won.” Tubbo said, hissing a bit as his shoulder throbbed. It seemed to be a recurring theme in his life now.

“Yeah, I can see that.” Quackity said. Tubbo choked as Quackity’s grip tightened on his shoulder. He could practically hear the bone creaking. Every muscle in his body pleaded with him to pull away.

Instead he forced himself to hold still. After a moment, burning heat began to radiate through his shoulder. The heat kept rising as if he had stuck his shoulder into the embers of a fire. Tubbo bit his lip so hard it bled, trying not to cry.

There was a moment where the pain crescendoed and he was almost certain that Quackity had lied and the man was trying to kill him. Moments before he could pull away, the heat suddenly died, leaving his shoulder blissfully numb.

Tubbo let out a weak sigh. "Is it over?" He asked. Quackity held his shoulder for a moment more before releasing it.

"It will be kind of tender for a while." Quackity said. "You'll need to be careful with it. No falling or taking hard hits for a while. That shoulder remembers what it's like being broken and it'll be easy for it to return to that state. But that's about what I can do, yes."

"No promises on being careful." Tubbo said, grinning. Quackity grinned back, wing tips flicking back and forth.

"I can see that." He said. Quackity turned away, staring into the forest. "Last chance, kid. Schlatt can be kind of annoying but we'd treat you well. Can't promise the next two Courts aren't going to throw you into the deep end."

"And this wasn't?" Tubbo said, shaking his head. The trial was purposefully set up to be confusing, the penalty was going to be his Name, and now he knew the Autumn Court ~~would~~ could be pursuing him later.

"Well, we weren't trying to kill you." Quackity said. Tubbo stared at him, trying to communicate the depth of his contempt for that statement. "Hey, you fell out of that tree by yourself."

"Fundy."

"If you follow a mysterious fox off the path in the Veil, we take no responsibility for that." Quackity said, shrugging.

There was logic there. Tubbo wasn't quite sure what kind of logic was there, but it was there. "Okay then." He said, coughing a bit.

Unlike before, this wasn't a feigned cough, but a real one. Even though entering the Veil meant losing the need for food and water, his body hadn't quite gotten the memo. His throat alternated between being fine and as dry as the desert.

He really hoped that Tommy, being asleep, wasn't having the same problem.

"Need a drink?" Quackity asked. Tubbo flushed, shaking his head. He just wanted to get going. The quicker he got to the Summer Court, the quicker he could go home and have a nice safe meal.

"I'm fine." He said, waving a hand. "I'd rather we just start walking. On the path preferably."

“Suit yourself.” Quackity said, shrugging. He didn’t step on the path when he walked, only walking parallel to it. Despite being a bit shorter than Schlatt, he was still tall enough that Tubbo was slightly behind.

Tubbo took a moment to look at his wings. They weren’t as large as Philza’s but arguably much more colorful. He had heard rumors that they were perpetually stained with the blood of those who had tried to outrun their debt, but Quackity’s feathers were as clean and as well cared for as any other birds he’d seen.

He was the only other person Tubbo had seen with wings. “Are you related to Philza?” Tubbo asked.

Quackity made an odd choking sound, nearly walking into a tree before awkwardly stumbling around it. “What would make you think that?” He said, his voice shrill.

“I mean, it makes sense doesn’t it?” Tubbo said, counting off the reasons on his fingers. “You have wings like him, you’re both kind of short, you’re both smug annoyances, and I’ve heard one of his sons wears a similar knitted hat.”

“Those are terrible reasons.” Quackity muttered. Tubbo watched in fascination as his feathers ruffled and shifted like a bird’s. “My hat is far better than Wilbur’s and our wings look nothing alike.”

“If it walks like a duck and quacks like one…” Tubbo said, letting it trail off. He knew Quackity couldn’t really be related, but it was nice to be able to joke around a little.

Quackity glared at him but there was no real heat to it. “Keep going like that and maybe I’ll lead Schlatt right to you.”

Tubbo stumbled. “Would you?” He asked, his heart plummeting.

Despite the confidence he assumed when he announced his solution, the confidence had quickly disappeared after fleeing. He didn’t know how long he could keep his resolve if he was taken by Schlatt.

The thought was bittersweet. Once, he wondered how Tommy had let the Fey get so close. Now, he had a good idea.

Quackity’s response came agonizingly slow. “Now? Mm, I don’t know about that.” He said. “But later? Yeah, I’d probably do it.”

“Can I make a deal with you to stay out of it?” Tubbo asked. It was risky, but keeping one Fae out could make a huge difference between getting captured and him keeping a step ahead.

Quackity chuckled. “Kid, you’re forgetting who encouraged the guy to consider adopting in the first place.” He said. “You’re a good kid for him. He didn’t try to have you killed once.”

“Except for Fundy.” Tubbo reminded quietly. But he wasn’t sure who he was trying to remind.

Quackity waved a hand dismissively. “And I like you too, and Fundy’s open to the idea as well.” He paused. “Well, he wasn’t at first. But by now, he’s been mostly convinced and I doubt he’ll make trouble about it.”

Tubbo cursed silently. There went the possibility of convincing Fundy. He should have gone with his instincts.

“It doesn’t matter what you guys like.” Tubbo said finally. His gaze dropped to the leaves at his feet. They were easier to look at. Plenty of golden leaves here.

“But does it matter what you like?” Quackity said. Tubbo refused to look at him. “You seemed pretty eager to listen to him back there.”

“I want Tommy back.” Tubbo said. “Not whatever the Winter Court is trying to create, but my Tommy. And I want to go home and forget this ever happened to me outside of telling scary stories around the fire.”

“I don’t think that can ever happen, kid.” Quackity said. “You and your friend are in deep now. Even if you succeed and escape the Veil, you’ll never be able to escape completely. Like it or not, the Veil leaves its mark on you.”

And some part of Tubbo, deep down, knew that. Remembered the darkness in Schlatt’s eyes and knew that his world would never be the same. The temptation to turn back would always be there.

But he also knew that he couldn’t let go of his world without a fight. No matter how tempting the offer, Tommy was still waiting for him.

“Only a week and a half left.” Quackity said quietly. He stopped in front of Tubbo, forcing Tubbo to look back up at him. “You know, even without being strong allies to Winter, the other Courts are just as dangerous.”

“I told you.” Tubbo said. He took a deep breath, trying to let all of the fear out of him and leave only courage behind. “I’m winning this. It doesn’t matter what they throw at me, or what you guys try. I’m winning.”

And he was tired of people thinking that he didn’t know the danger. He did. But Tommy was worth it.

“Okay, kid.” Quackity said. His wing bumped against Tubbo’s shoulder, forcing him to brace before he fell. “Then this is where we go our separate ways. If you follow the path, it’ll lead you to Summer’s domain.”

“Safely.” Tubbo said.

“Safely.” Quackity agreed. He laughed, shaking his head. “It took me a long time to perfect those letters, I don’t want them getting destroyed. You better make sure they stay safe.”

“I will.” Tubbo promised. That he could do. Quackity smiled, waving at him.

“Nice talking to you.” He said. “Good luck, kid. I’d rather not get you back in critical condition.”

“I appreciate the sentiment.” Tubbo said. The last part was terrifying but he was just going to ignore that for his peace of mind. “For the sentiment at least.”

Quackity nodded, turning and walking back down the path. Tubbo stood there, watching him and trying to ignore the aching sense of loss.

It would fade, he knew. But it would never completely leave him almost as if the trees had grown their own roots in his heart. Tubbo looked up, watching the leaves rustle in the breeze.

“You’ll find another.” Tubbo said, watching the breeze drift through the canopy. He hoped they would, someone who was willing to stay. But then he remembered the darkness and greed and he didn’t think this would be the last time he saw them.

But he had a quest to continue and he couldn’t stay here in the autumnal grove forever.

And so Tubbo continued forward on the path, looking for the green forests of Summer.

Chapter End Notes

Also, you may be wondering about my new work! Changing of the Seasons will be a one shot collection covering unofficial add ons in the Snow King universe. New POVs, stories of Tubbo and Tommy’s life together, unofficial endings... :)

Harsh Sunlight

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tubbo had been expecting the forest of Summer to look much like the Autumn territory. After all, with the difference of tree types and seasons, don't most forests look alike?

Apparently, not in the Veil. Stepping into Summer had been like stepping into another world. The sunlight went from an almost twilight dimness to the harsh hot sunlight of midday. And with every step forward, the heat only grew.

He had been forced to remove his suit jacket, tying it around his waist and rolling up the sleeves of his sweater.

Under his feet, the dried leaves gave way to a soft and springy bed of grass. Everything was lush and green, caught at the very height of summer.

And it was completely silent.

No breeze. No animals moving through the undergrowth. Nothing.

Tubbo kept a wary eye on his surroundings. When forests went silent, it meant there were big predators about. In his world, that meant bears. In the Veil, it could mean anything from a dragon to a Hunt.

He wracked his mind, trying to remember anything about the Summer Court. It was almost next to nothing. It had been years since he had traveled through an area where the Summer Court held sway. Any tales the village had had been stripped of their detail by fading memories.

He knew that much like the Winter Court, Hunts were very common. And from George, he knew that Dream, one of the Summer Fey, liked to wear green.

So, basically nothing. Tubbo sighed.

A twig snapped.

Tubbo forced himself to keep his pace. Whoever was doing this wanted to see him scared, wanted to send him running. And running from a predator could be deadly.

Another snap, closer now. This time, he couldn't quite hide the flinch. Tubbo closed his eyes for a moment, trying to think of what to do. Now that he was listening, he could hear the occasionally crunching sound as someone pressed down hard on a clump of grass.

The Fae hunting him was getting impatient.

As soon as he leaves the path, he forfeits the protection. But it will be difficult to hide if he doesn't leave the path. Which meant he had to get the Fae to reveal themselves so he could figure out what they wanted. Tubbo opened his eyes, grimacing a little.

He was tired of having to talk to Fey. Did he have to? Yes. Did he want to? No.

But he had no choice but to call them out. "If you want to follow me, you could just do it out in the open." Tubbo said, trying to keep his voice even.

Another twig popped but the forest remained silent on who it was. "Suit yourself." Tubbo said, speeding up. "Not like I have time to stop and talk anyways."

He had already lost half a week to his injuries and then to the Autumn Court. He was going to be cutting it close anyways.

A branch above him shook as if someone had leaped off of it. "Are you having fun?" Tubbo said, squinting up. He couldn't see anyone. Could some of the Fey become invisible?

"Yes."

Tubbo hated to admit it but he squeaked, backpedaling and falling over. He let out a soft grunt as his back hit the ground, briefly driving the breath out of his lungs.

"That's more like it." Someone said. A face appeared above him, watching him.

Well, if you could call it a face. Tubbo pressed back into the ground, seeing soulless black eyes and a wide smile like a slash of paint. No nose or eyelashes, just skin as smooth as porcelain.

Because it was porcelain, he realized with a small flash of relief. Porcelain that had been painted with a simple smiley face similar to masks he had seen before at festivals.

"More like what?" Tubbo asked. The masked person tilted their head. Now that he could see beyond the mask, he noticed they were wearing a bright green cloak, uncaring of the heat. Their hood cast the mask into shadow, sending a shiver down Tubbo's spine as those soulless eyes looked at him.

"Fear." The Fae said, because what else could they be? "Most tend to jump at the second sign."

"Well. Why should I?" Tubbo said. Despite his boldness, his heart felt like it was about to hammer through his chest.

"It's natural." The Fae said. Tubbo scowled at him. Yes, fear was natural, but using fear as a control felt dirty and wrong. "Mortals don't like to be reminded they're mortal. That there are bigger predators out there."

"I've met bigger predators." Tubbo said, pushing himself up. The Fae barely shifted enough to give him room to stand, leaving them in uncomfortably close proximity. "And I've walked away from them too."

Schlatt with his eyes of madness. Quackity's sly grin. Fundy's charming words. He'd survived them. He'll continue surviving.

"And anyways, if this is a typical kind of entertainment for you guys, I think you know where I'm going." Tubbo said. And wasn't that the home of the biggest predator of them all? "Why ruin that fun?"

"True." The Fae acknowledged. "But wouldn't it be more fun to kill you just before you reach it? To see your despair as you slowly bleed out?"

"No." Tubbo said, his stomach lurching. He stepped around the Fae, beginning to walk again. "And I rather you not try it."

"You say that like you can stop me." Eerily, Tubbo realized he couldn't hear his footsteps. The Fae walked completely soundlessly like a large cat stalking a mouse.

Tubbo had a good feeling that if he showed any fear, if he backed down at all, the Fae would kill him. It was in the way the mask seemed to catch his every reaction as if looking for a moment to strike.

He forced himself to stand up straight. "I can't." He acknowledged. Stupidity wouldn't do him any good. "But then I'll be dead and the entertainment is gone. Would that really be worth it, Dream?"

The Fae twitched, ever so slightly, and Tubbo smiled at it. It was the cloak that gave it away. George had mentioned that Dream wore green. It was still a long shot but one he had decided to try.

"You know my name." Dream said. "So why don't you give me yours?"

Tubbo frowned at him. "Really? That's like the oldest trick in the book." He honestly thought the use of that phrasing was something only found in very old stories.

"It works sometimes." The Fae said. Even the act of shrugging looked like a threat. Tubbo felt his stomach lurch a bit at the thought, feeling a brief flash of pity for whoever had been fool enough to give their Name to a Fae.

"You can call me Tubbo." He said.

The Fae reached up, tapping the edge of the mask as if they were thinking very hard. "The mortal boy who challenged the Winter Court." He said.

Tubbo groaned. It felt like almost everyone knew who he was. "How fast does news travels in the Veil?"

"Not very fast. George sent me notice that you were in the Autumn Court." Dream said. Despite his mask, Tubbo could feel the eyes boring into him. "I'm surprised you made it through."

“Part luck, part skill.” Tubbo said truthfully. And part because he didn’t think Schlatt wanted to hurt him. Otherwise, he would have been in big trouble.

It was a bit nerve wracking when he remembered Quackity’s words on the dangers ahead. And yet comforting. It was easy to compartmentalize a threat against his life, turn into something logical he could break down and examine.

It was more nerve wracking to defend against his own emotions.

The Summer Court would be like any other story of the Courts he had heard. And that was comforting in an odd way.

“Most would just say one.” Dream observed. “But I can understand. Sometimes it’s not just about making the jump, it’s making the jump at the right time.”

“Exactly.” Tubbo said, nodding. He was pretty sure that if he had come up with the answer sooner, Schlatt would have bent the rules to make it more complicated.

“The Summer Court is similar in that respect.” Dream said, lowering his hand. “Except trials tend to be a bit more like... games.”

“Games.” Tubbo echoed. There was something almost bloodthirsty radiating from the mask now. He could imagine that what he would consider a game was very different than what Dream thought.

“Yes.” Dream said, tilting his head back. “I’ll be most interested in seeing what you do. And if you survive.”

“I’ve made it through the Winter Court and the Autumn Court.” Tubbo said. He wiped the sweat off his face, grinning cheekily at Dream. “I think I can play a game.”

Dream was quiet for a long moment. “I imagined you differently.” He said.

Tubbo frowned. If the news had traveled so fast, shouldn’t Dream know quite a bit about him by now? “Why?” Tubbo asked.

“You’re smaller, and milder mannered than your friend from what I hear.” Dream said.

“When most mortals choose to make this kind of wager, it’s because they couldn’t imagine their life without the other. They need the other like a plant needs sunlight, a sheep that needs to be driven along. But you can stand on your own two feet.”

“Well, yeah.” Tubbo said, wrinkling his nose. “Of course I can. Smaller, and I’m going to ignore the bit about milder, means nothing. Tommy is my *friend*.”

His brother in all but blood, his platonic soulmate. He had spent hundreds of nights by his side, and just as many days. They were partners, equals, who knew each other so well that others had whispered of a mind sharing curse.

Tubbo could stand without Tommy. He wouldn’t die like a plant without sunlight. He was his own person with his own desires and hopes. But Tommy completed him in a way,

complimented him and all of his faults. He would survive, but he would never be the same without the sunlight.

And he knew it was the same for Tommy. Just as Tommy completed him, he completed Tommy.

How do you describe that to a Fae who thinks of violence as a game? Could they even understand a trade that wasn't one sided in some form?

"I don't know how to describe it." Tubbo said lamely. And privately, he didn't want to, wanting to keep his bond safe and secret. "He's important to me. He always will be. And I want him to come home."

"Even if his home is a different place now? You'd take him back?"

"That's ignoring the situation." Tubbo argued. He knew Tommy like he knew himself. If Tommy truly considered the Winter Court as his home, he would have told Tubbo. "Tommy would have talked to me, really talked to me. Being enchanted by the Fey doesn't mean he's willing."

"But it doesn't mean he's not willing." Tubbo scowled at Dream. "Fey Glamour doesn't work on nothing. On some level, he had to want it."

"Well, then, he can defrost and tell me that himself." Tubbo snapped. But the thought still lingered, burrowing in the back of his mind and refusing to leave.

Dream was almost more annoying than Schlatt. If anything, he was worse in some aspects, Dream seemed to delight in pushing buttons Tubbo didn't even know he had.

"Would you really let him go if he wanted it?" Dream asked. The mask tapping was back again and Tubbo could feel those painted eyes boring into him.

"You're as selfish as any Fey."

He knew what he wanted.

"I want what's best for Tommy." Tubbo said finally. It was a cop out and Dream and he both knew it.

"But what about what's best for you?"

"Do you have a book or something?" Tubbo asked, staring at Dream. The Fae hummed, confused. "Full of stuff like how to make humans uncomfortable? Because it kind of feels like you're going down a list right now."

"Am I making you uncomfortable?" Dream asked silkily. The exact tone of someone who knew the answer to that question but wanted to watch the other squirm a bit.

Tubbo refused to give it to him. "Yes." He said crossly. "If you want to be frustrating, go off and play one of your games and leave me out of it."

“And if I want to play a game with you?” Dream asked. The unsaid threat was hanging in the air.

“I’m taken.” Tubbo said. “Summer King. Third charm. You know how it is.”

Dream seemed a bit thoughtful. As much as someone in a mask can look like anyways. “Yes. I suppose I do know how it is.” He said.

Well that was good. Tubbo breathed a secret sigh of relief. He thought Dream was about to force the issue on him.

“This path will bring you right to the throne room.” Dream said, his voice soft and even again. Not a hint of the threat left. “Are you sure you’re ready?”

“No.” Tubbo said honestly. “But sitting around and waiting isn’t going to make me any more ready than I am right now.”

He had a goal and the determination to see it through. Wasn’t that enough, really?

“Some would call you overconfident for a mortal.” Tubbo squinted at him suspiciously. That didn’t sound like an insult.

“Some would call you rude for a Fae.” He said. Tubbo rubbed his forehead. He had been hoping to use this walk to think about how to handle the deal with the Summer King.

His head jerked up as Dream made an odd sound like a tea kettle whistling. “You’re right there.” He said.

Wait. Was that his laugh?

Involuntarily, Tubbo giggled. It was just such an odd laugh for a Fae that he couldn’t help himself. He froze, hoping that couldn’t be taken as an offense.

“It’s the laugh, isn’t it?” Dream said, a thread of amusement in his voice. “George thinks it’s hilarious as well.”

As Dream turned towards Tubbo, Tubbo saw a brief flash from his wrist, underneath the cloak. Some sort of green stone on a thin silver chain. Tubbo frowned. Something about that seemed familiar.

“It’s definitely unusual.” Tubbo said, looking at Dream closer. Maybe George had mentioned the bracelet? But now, George hadn’t mentioned much other than Dream’s love for green clothing.

And Dream definitely didn’t seem like the recipient for Quackity’s letter.

But then why did he look familiar? Tubbo was pretty sure he had never seen anyone like him before.

“You’re lucky you came now.” Dream said, not acknowledging Tubbo’s confused stare. “We’re about to hit midwinter. That’s when the best games are played as Winter distracts itself by freezing leaves and such.”

“What kind of games are played?” Tubbo asked cautiously. It was pretty likely those games may become a trial for him.

He really hoped not though. Most Fey were far more agile and stronger than humans. While Tubbo was no slouch, and he was even proud of his physical prowess, the possibility worried him.

“That would ruin the surprise, wouldn’t it?” Dream said. “We’re not much further away now. You’ll find out when you get there.”

Great. Fantastic. And he had actually seemed kind of nice for a moment there. At least it wouldn’t be much farther to walk.

Though, one thing was weird. What was Dream’s role in all of this? Was he meant to be a welcome crew like Fundy? Or was he a guard like George?

“Speaking of which-“

Tubbo yelped and ducked as a fireball flew over his head, singing the tree behind him. He took a few steps back down the path, ready to run.

“Wrong person!” Someone yelled. Dream tilted his head to the side, neatly avoiding another flying fireball.

“With hits like that, it’s no wonder I won our last game.” Dream joked. Tubbo watched him warily, concerned this was some kind of trap. “You nearly hit that kid though, Sapnap.”

“How do you know it wasn’t on purpose?” Sapnap said, grinning as he came into view. His hair and eyes were as dark as coal, and his fingertips still flickered with little flames.

Summer Fey are connected with fire, Tubbo thought, still jittery. It was still odd to see someone who had their hand on fire.

“Because you yelled ‘wrong person’ and then threw something at Dream?” Tubbo suggested. He flinched back as Sapnap looked at him, worried Sapnap would throw another.

“In my defense, he usually walks alone!” Sapnap said. He blinked. “Wait. Why is there a human kid here?”

“You’ve only just noticed? Now I definitely know why I won.” Dream said. Sapnap made what had to be a very rude gesture considering how Dream’s shoulders shook in silent laughter, only a small wheeze escaping.

“I’m not a kid.” Tubbo corrected, trying not to think of Schlatt’s words. “And I’m here to meet the Summer King so I can make a deal.”

“Really?” Sapnap said, glancing between him and Dream. He raised an eyebrow. “To meet the Summer King?”

Dream made a sharp motion. “We met while out walking.”

Well, Tubbo was walking. He was pretty sure Dream had been stalking him to terrify him and laugh at his reactions. So ‘walking’ and ‘met’ were kind of a stretch.

“Okay then.” Sapnap said, drawing out the words. Tubbo tilted his head, confused. Did he miss something here? “Does that mean fireball tag isn’t on right now?”

Tubbo froze as Dream looked at him. Would Dream be more likely to say yes if he asked not to be dragged into it?

“Not right now.” Dream said after a long moment. “But maybe in a bit. I’m just going to walk him to the throne room real quick.”

“You don’t have to.” Tubbo intervened. Sapnap snorted, likely amused by the note of pleading he couldn’t quite hide. “I can get there just fine by myself.”

“I insist.” Dream said smoothly. He inclined his head at Sapnap who grinned back. “Do you want to walk with us?”

“Nah.” Sapnap said, still grinning. “I’m going to see about getting the others together so we can have a game. I’ll meet up with you soon.”

He flicked his hand, throwing sparks across the forest floor and laughing when Tubbo took a step back. When Tubbo looked back up, Sapnap was gone.

“Have you never seen a Summer Fey control fire before?” Dream asked.

“No.” Tubbo admitted. That wouldn’t be giving too much away, right? What could Dream do with that information? He leaned down a bit, looking at the singed leaves.

It looked kind of like someone had flicked their wet hands, sending embers instead of water droplets everywhere. The tiny embers were already beginning to burn out.

“Interesting, isn’t it?” Dream said, right next to him. Tubbo nearly jumped a foot in the air, glaring at him.

“Yeah, I suppose.” Tubbo said, hoping Dream wouldn’t take it as an invitation to burn him. “I didn’t see that much of it but it was impressive.”

Dream tilted his head before his hand lit up with a beautiful golden flame.

Despite his concern, Tubbo leaned in a bit, fascinated. Despite the heat he could feel radiating off the flame, Dream was completely unaffected.

Dream tilted his hand, making the fire waver. “All the Summer Fey have the power to control fire.” He said. Tubbo nodded, watching as the golden flame flickered.

There was something strangely hypnotic about the way it flickered and danced. Like there was something hidden at the very heart of it and if he watched long enough, he would be able to see it.

He just had to keep watching. He couldn't look away. Tubbo felt like he was locked in place. A hand came to rest on his shoulder and he tried to shake it off.

The flame was brought closer, dragging his attention back to it. Tubbo stilled, watching as sparks flew off the flame, falling as gently as rain.

Distantly, he could hear someone talking to him, a soft murmur that was just on the edge of his hearing.

"Oh, you really are quite vulnerable to this, aren't you? The flame calls to you."

Everytime he tried to see who it was, the flame would flicker and dance and he'd look back. He'd have to, or he'd miss... he'd miss... Something important. The flame was right in front of him, consuming him.

It was hot, Tubbo thought muzzily. And growing hotter. Was that why he couldn't think? A little voice in the back of his head screamed at him to take a few steps back. Just to cool off. That sounded nice. It'd be cooler away from the fire or as cool as it was here. He wouldn't even have to look away.

Tubbo lurched a few steps away. There was an awkward pull at his shoulder and instinctively, he looked down to see what it was.

He blinked as the world seemed to rush back together. Dream's hand slipped off his shoulder. His eyes felt like they were burning, far too dry, and he blinked a few times.

"You hypnotized me." Tubbo said, his voice raspy and dry. He swallowed hard, keeping his eyes fixed on the ground. He hadn't known Summer Fey could do something like that. He grimaced. It looks like he'd have to be a lot more careful.

"I wanted to see what would happen." Dream said with a lax quality to his voice that grated on Tubbo's nerves. "I'm surprised you managed to break out. You were pretty far under."

"That's all of your reasoning?" Tubbo snapped. For a moment, the words rose to his lips. *Monstrous. Cruel. Inhuman.* But why would Dream care? Undoubtedly, he had been called all of those words and more in the past.

"Do I need more?" Dream said, tilting his head. "You weren't hurt. Not even a little singed. And you seemed to be enjoying it."

"I also had no clue what was happening to me." Tubbo said, burying his face in his hands. Everything had felt soft and fuzzy. He wasn't able to focus on anything else other than the flame until the heat overcame the magic. It reminded him, sickeningly, of how Tommy had acted.

Was that how Tommy was feeling right now?

“I suppose that must be annoying.” Dream said. And it was so smugly diplomatic that Tubbo nearly growled at him. “I guess it was a bit unsportsmanlike.”

“That’s what you’re concerned about?” Tubbo snapped. “That it might violate some rule you’ve made for a messed up game in your head?”

“No.” Dream said. The friendly person with a laugh like a tea kettle had disappeared. There was the soft shuffle of boots over grass. “But it’s something that you should be concerned about. The shape of the game isn’t quite finished yet.”

“I don’t want to play your game.” Tubbo said. He pulled his hands away from his head, taking a look down. He was still on the path though only by inches. Good enough. “I’m going to go make my deal and leave.”

It took only a few steps before he heard the footsteps behind him. Tubbo refused to look, not wanting to be snared again. “Go away.” He snapped. He was absolutely done with entertaining Dream.

“Why should I?” Dream said. “Last I checked, you have no authority over me. Unless you want to make a deal in exchange for me leaving, but that would backfire quite heavily upon you.”

“I don’t want to make a deal.” Tubbo said, gritting his teeth. He could feel a terrible headache coming on and what he really wanted was a cup of tea and a nice quiet shady spot. Not a Fey dogging his steps. Even Tommy had known to give him a bit of space when he had a headache, speaking in softer tones. “Please. Can you go away?”

“No.” Dream said. Tubbo briefly debated the merits of curling into a little ball and having a mental breakdown before discarding them. He didn’t want to give Dream the satisfaction of seeing that.

“Why not?” Tubbo asked. “I’m sure there’s far more entertaining things to do. Like your game with Sapnap! He seemed excited about it.”

“Playing with Sapnap is fun.” Dream said, his voice a bit lighter. Tubbo could practically hear the unseen smile. “But no, I have my mind set on a different game. I’m not quite sure which one will work yet but I know it will be fun. Everyone will enjoy it.”

“What about George then?” Tubbo said, casting about desperately. Wasn’t there anything to make Dream go away for a bit so he could get his thoughts back in order?

“What about him?” Dream said. There was a quiet tapping sound. “You know, if I was a suspicious person, I would say that it seems like you’re trying to drive me away. But I don’t think you would. We’re friends, aren’t we? And friends don’t try to drive friends away. That would be a very rude thing to do.”

“It is a rude thing to do to friends.” Tubbo said. True words, but he didn’t consider Dream a friend. “But isn’t it also rude not to let your friends have some alone time?”

Was Dream pulling this out to be contrary at this point? Tubbo couldn't see why. Other than George, there was no reason for the Fae to be interested in him. Something was wrong but he just couldn't put it together, his mind thrown off by the headache and Dream's barbed words.

"I don't think so." Dream said. "And I'm the older one here so I think I should know more about it."

"Maybe for Fey." Tubbo pointed out. He could feel a burning heat just behind him, Dream far too close for comfort. "But humans tend to want to keep their personal space."

"Strange." Dream said. Tubbo shivered despite how warm it was. "Can't you bend a bit? Because we're good friends. I just want to keep you company, soothe your nerves with a bit of conversation."

And despite himself, Tubbo wavered. He knew Dream was wrong. Dream had taken advantage of his lack of knowledge and might have succeeded if it wasn't for a brief window of escape. But there was that little voice in his head, the one that liked manners and longed to be respected, that whispered maybe Dream was trying to be kind, he just wasn't very good at it. Maybe Tubbo should just bend a little and let this all smooth over.

The voice that sounded a bit like Tommy told him Dream was a prick. "I think I want to be alone," Tubbo said, his voice small. He had to bite back the words *If that's okay*. Tommy was his best friend and knew when he wanted to be alone. That's what friends do. So Dream couldn't be acting as his friend

"You'll regret that if I do."

"Why?" Tubbo said. He could feel that terrible dread coming on. The sound of footsteps behind him had faded away but he knew Dream hadn't left. The Fae just wanted him to know that he was being hunted.

"Rather difficult to make a deal with the Summer King if he leaves, isn't it?" Dream said, a note of triumph in his voice.

He didn't want to believe it. Wanted to laugh, congratulate Dream on his dancing around the truth. Wanted to run. He did none of that.

Slowly, he turned around. Dream's mask stared back at him, haloed by the sunlight. Tubbo felt all the evidence in his head link together into one undeniable yet horrifying conclusion.

"Oh." Tubbo said. There was his fear again.

It had never truly left.

We've finally reached the Summer Court! I've been very excited for this arc.

Firefly Days

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tubbo stared at Dream. The other didn't move, watching him.

"Well?" Dream said. He was almost certain if he could see the other's face, they would be smiling. "Aren't you going to say something?"

He could say many things. He could ask for forgiveness for being rude. He could say they were friends. He could laugh. Countless words rose and fell before he said them.

He really wished he had Tommy here. Tommy would have been able to stand up tall and spit fire in every word. His absence was like a crack in Tubbo's heart, constantly reminding him of the absence.

Tubbo took a deep breath. He tilted his head up slowly, meeting where Dream's eyes would be. "So, what do you want in return for the Summer charm?"

He had met people like Dream before. Landlords, merchants, even Technoblade came to mind. They wanted to watch people cower and panic. And the moment they saw that panic, they'd pounce.

Dream slowly tilted his head. "No small talk? No questions? Just straight to the negotiation table?"

"I think I already knew you weren't some random encounter." Tubbo said, quietly. The clues had lined up so well but foolishly, he had gotten too frustrated to actually look.

He raised a hand counting them off. "For one, George had the status of ambassador and Schlatt joked it was connected to you. Two, you tracked me as soon as I entered and knew who I was. Three, Sapnap listened to you despite being clearly powerful. Not to mention so many other peculiarities."

Dream brought his hands up, clapping slowly. "Congratulations. Most people don't notice that much." He said. "You must be very proud of yourself."

"Not really." Tubbo said. He should have put it all together before the reveal. "We still have to make our wager first."

"So quick." Dream said. His hands lowered. "Don't you want to just talk? Aren't we friends? I really do feel like you're trying to get rid of me while I'm trying to help you."

Tubbo flinched a bit. Now he really wished he had Tommy with him, the other wouldn't have let Dream get under his skin like this. "It's nothing personal." He said. "But if you're really my friend, you'll understand that I need the Summer charm."

“Nice try.” Dream said. He waved a hand. “Should I say that the deal can only be made in my throne room?”

His stomach lurched. He could hear the echo of Schlatt’s words in Dream’s. And judging by the eyes boring into him, Dream knew it. “You don’t need one for this.” Tubbo said stubbornly. “And you know that.”

He needed to calm down. He wasn’t in the Autumn Court anymore. There was no way Schlatt could casually intrude on Dream’s turf to reach him.

But was he really sure about that?

“Worth a try.” Dream said. Like it was just another plan, easily discarded. How many plans did this guy have? “But I do think a change in location would be good.”

Tubbo stiffened. “Why?” He asked. Where they stood was a perfectly fine place, why would Dream want to change it?

“Don’t you listen to stories?” Dream asked. Tubbo gritted his teeth. Of course he did! “This isn’t the place for a big deal like this! It has no interest factor in it. It’s boring.”

“I think it would serve just fine.” Tubbo said. As much as he leaned on stories for wisdom, he didn’t care that much about mimicking one.

“Nonsense.” Dream said, waving a hand. “I know the perfect spot and it isn’t far from here. You just have to follow me for a bit.”

“And this route and place is safe?” Tubbo’s said, not moving a muscle. “For a mortal.”

“Absolutely.” Dream said, placing his hand over his heart with an exaggerated motion. “Would I ever steer you wrong?”

“If it was entertaining enough? Probably.” Tubbo said. He nearly jumped when Dream wheezed, that same high tea kettle sound. Dream’s shoulders shook with the sound.

“True.” Dream said, standing up straight again. “But we’re friends so I don’t want to hurt you right now.”

Part of Tubbo perked up a bit at hearing the bit about being friends. The other part heard the words ‘right now’. As in, the option was still on the table.

The worst part, Tubbo reflected, was that he knew he was being manipulated. He knew Dream didn’t actually consider him a friend. But some part of him wanted to listen every time he said it, because what if it was true?

“Fine then.” Tubbo agreed. If it was a safe trip, it wasn’t worth the fight. But he definitely didn’t like Dream’s insistence on it.

The feeling multiplied tenfold as Dream stepped away from the path. Tubbo stiffened, watching him. “Freezing up?” Dream said, looking back over his shoulder.

“Do I have to leave the path for this?” Tubbo asked.

“My route? Yes.” Dream said. His tone was cold steel. “I will not be taking a different route. And if you don’t arrive, I’ll take it as an automatic declining of the deal.”

Tubbo cursed. It’d be hard to argue that Dream’s automatic dismissal would be fair, especially if he offered safe escort. But he couldn’t try to use the path. He had no idea what Dream’s ideal spot looked like or where it was. If he tried to find the place on his own, he’d either get lost or killed.

He’d just have to hope he was making the right decision.

“Fine.” Tubbo said. Stepping off the path felt like signing his death warrant. The quiet of the forest round him seemed to be even more lifeless.

“Much better.” Dream said, cheerily. He was far too close for Tubbo’s comfort. “This path is the fastest. You’ll need to follow closer though, I wouldn’t want to see you trip into anything terrible.”

“I’m sure that would be very terrible for you.” Tubbo said. He cursed silently as Dream took off at a jog, having to run to keep up with the other. His legs were screaming after a few steps.

“I’ve been to this place many times before.” Dream said casually as if they were two friends out on a walk. “It’s very pretty, we use it as the beginning stage of our games a lot.”

“Well, I’m glad it’s pretty.” Tubbo said wryly. “I’d hate to get murdered in an ugly place. It’s the reputation you know.”

Not that he could really tell the difference. The Veil had a terrible beauty to it from Philza’s throne room to the forests of Autumn and now here in Summer.

Dream did that odd wheeze laugh again. “Completely understandable.” He said. “Who wants their corpse to be discovered at less than their best?”

“Is that why you wear your mask?” Tubbo asked. Scattered bits of story and speculation were coming back to him now. A couple he was pretty sure were about other people but a few sounded like Dream?

Some said that it was simply a form of intimidation. But others said it was to hide the face of a monster, some kind of secret to magic, or war wounds from fighting the previous king.

The laughter fades away. “What do they say now?” Dream asked, his tone derisive. “Am I hideous? A monster?”

“It depends on who’s saying it.” Tubbo said. He had a feeling he had pushed too far and was on unsteady ground now. “One particularly ridiculous one claims that the mask will disappear when you fall in love, usually by describing some sort of fair and virtuous person as the love interest.”

“Oh, that’s a better one.” Dream said. Tubbo relaxed just a bit as the derision melted into amusement. “And I will then give up my wicked ways? Despite having so much fun?”

“That’s the idea.” Tubbo said, looking up into the trees. He couldn’t see anyone following him but he had the eerie feeling they were being watched. “Seen any virtuous people to fall in love with?”

Dream raised a hand to his chin as if thinking. “Now that you mention it... I think the town I burned a while ago may have had one.”

Tubbo’s laughter cut off abruptly, an odd feeling of embarrassment filling him. It was easy to get carried away with lighter conversation. In the moments between the gaze of the Hunter, Dream was surprisingly witty.

But that didn’t erase that the Fae was a Hunter. And even now, they were being watched.

If Dream noticed Tubbo’s sudden silence, he didn’t remark upon it. “Oh well, there goes your chance.” He said, shrugging and lowering his hand.

“Hm.” Tubbo said, distracted. “Is there someone following us?”

Dream tilted his head to the side, watching Tubbo. “Do you think someone is watching us?” He asked because he was a terrible person who couldn’t cut Tubbo some slack.

“Yes.”

“And why is that?” Dream said. Tubbo could hear the pitfall waiting in his words. “You walk with the Summer King. Who would dare intrude upon our conversation?”

“Your friends.” Tubbo said. Don’t back down, he reminded himself. “Sapnap did mention finding others.”

If Dream was anything like Philza or Schlatt, his friends were likely upper members of the Court. Dream wouldn’t even have to whisper a command.

They’d kill Tubbo if Dream showed the slightest desire and he wouldn’t know until his blood was painting the forest floor.

“And what do you think of that?” Dream asked. Friendly Dream was gone now. “What will you do?”

“Me?” Tubbo asked. He clasped his hands behind his back, trying to summon up every bit of strength he knew he had. “Nothing.”

“Nothing?” Dream said. Tubbo couldn’t hear a bit of surprise in his voice.

“You want to play a game.” Tubbo said, regarding Dream steadily. “You invite more players. If I tried to change that, I’d change the game and I don’t think you’ll allow it.”

For all of Dream's wild grace, Tubbo was getting more and more aware of how Dream could drive someone into making decisions they wouldn't otherwise. He'd have to thank the Fae, if it wasn't for the identity reveal, he wouldn't realize how much of that button pushing was to keep him off kilter.

It was like that one group of hunters he and Tommy had traveled with for a few days, months before they had settled in the cabin. Near the end of the trip, the hunters had found a solitary deer. Every hunter had stationed themselves at certain points, alternating scaring the deer along a path until it staggered into a ditch and broke its leg.

None of them had even been winded. That night, he and Tommy had snuck out of the camp and got as far away as possible.

Tubbo glanced away from Dream, looking into the trees. "I'm guessing they'll show themselves when we reach the discussion point." He said. "To act as witnesses."

"Do you think we'll need witnesses." Dream said. He didn't phrase it as a question, already knowing the answer.

Tubbo shrugged. "Schlatt called for them." He said. He had a good idea of the price of these charms now and Dream did too. He would be shocked if the forfeit wasn't high.

And then terrified because if it wasn't, that meant Dream was planning something.

"You're very pessimistic." Dream remarked. Tubbo could hear his cloak rustling and he turned slowly, trying not to look afraid. But Dream was playing with his bracelet, not a knife. "Is this common with mortals now?"

"Some of us." Tubbo said. Tommy hadn't been pessimistic. He had looked at the world like it was the greatest adventure he'd ever seen. Tubbo was less enamored. The duality had worked for them.

"You should be careful or you're going to get on someone's nerves." Dream said.

"I'll take that under advisement." Tubbo said. After all, he got on Technoblade's nerves and used it to escape. "How much further do we have to go?"

"Not far." Dream said. Tubbo twitched as branches rustled nearby. "Why? Feeling tired already?"

"No." Tubbo said. That was a lie. If it wasn't for the magic of the Veil, he was pretty sure he would have collapsed a while ago. His mind felt the exhaustion and his muscles were screaming, but somehow it never hit the point of actually needing rest. "Just ready to see the game you have planned."

Because despite all the dancing around, Tubbo and Dream both knew the game was set already. Tubbo grimaced. The trick now was how he'd defeat Dream and an unknown group of friends.

"Hm." Dream said, looking in front of them. "Then we're here."

Tubbo took a deep breath when they stepped into the clearing. It was beautiful. The trees opened up to reveal a small pond, sunlight dappling the water. Small white flowers dotted the ground.

A cool breeze washed over him, making Tubbo slump a little at finally getting a little relief from the heat.

“This is where we start our games.” Dream said, surveying the area. “Not all of them, but for what I have planned, it will work fine.”

Now that he was looking closer, he could see areas where the ground had been scorched black. Deep divots had been carved out as if someone had taken a shovel and wildly hacked at the ground.

“Alright then.” Tubbo said, turning back towards Dream. “What are the terms you want?”

“That’s a heavy question.” Dream said, tapping at the bottom of his mask. “As you know, the price for losing will be high. You’re asking for a lot.”

“I know.” Tubbo said. Schlatt had said the same before demanding his Name in exchange. He shivered at the memory, the past situation now clear to him.

Dream nodded. “I’ve decided.” He said. “If you lose, I can call you for a game whenever I wish.”

Tubbo choked a bit. “For a game?” He asked, his voice stuttering a bit over the last word. He’d be eternally trapped into the role of prey in whatever twisted scheme the other could devise.

“You know how it is. Sometimes you want to have a bit of variety. You seem like you’d be an interesting player.” Dream said, shrugging.

Tubbo stumbled over his words. “I really don’t think I would be.” He said. A deal like this meant no chance of easing the consequences later. It wouldn’t matter how far away he was. Dream could call him whenever he wished.

Dream watched him steadily. “I think you will be.” He said. Tubbo chewed on his bottom lip, thinking about it. It was a pretty terrible forfeit on the outset.

Then again, if he lost, would he care? Would he be allowed to try again?

“Is there an alternative?” Tubbo asked. He wanted to get a better idea of what Dream might be interested in.

Dream tilted his head. “If you want, I could follow Schlatt’s example and ask for your Name. I’ll get what I want in the end either way.”

Tubbo flinched back a bit at the reminder. That was a pretty heavy consequence too.

“I choose-“ The words wouldn’t come out. Tubbo sighed. At least he might be able to rechallenge with the first. “The first forfeit. Of being summoned for games.”

“Good choice.” And Tubbo wasn’t sure if he should be terrified of how pleased Dream sounded about that. “I suppose I should introduce my friends then so I can explain how the game will work. Unless you want to back out now?”

“No.” Tubbo said, squaring his shoulders. “Let’s see about finishing this deal.”

“So be it.” Dream said. He waved a hand, effortlessly casual. Tubbo flinched as branches rustled, spinning around to look at the opposite side of the pond. “Come on out then, guys.”

The first one he saw was Sapnap, flames gone but no less exuberant. The Fae was practically bouncing up and down, his face filled with wicked excitement.

The next two were new. One, a tall cat hybrid, with tan fur and darker markings. They seemed calmer than Sapnap, watching Tubbo with steady eyes.

The second made Tubbo inch back a bit. They towered over everyone else in the clearing, their gracefully angled horns adding even more to their height. Their skin was as dark as a crow’s wing. The only facial features he could make out were their pure white eyes, with no pupil or iris.

“Sapnap, you know already.” Dream said as if he didn’t notice Tubbo’s shock. “The cat is Ant and the taller one is Bad.”

Bad grinned at Tubbo. Horrifyingly, though Tubbo could make out a sharp set of canines, the fae’s teeth were as black as his skin. “Nice to meet you.” He said. “I’m sure I can speak for everyone when I say that.”

Any and Sapnap nodded. “Nice to meet you too.” Tubbo said. He had a feeling he wouldn’t feel the same way in a bit.

“Where’s Sam?” Dream asked, watching the forest. “I thought he was planning to come.”

“He was.” Ant said. He didn’t seem affected by Dream’s unwavering gaze. “But Ponk asked him to come over so he chose to go there instead.”

“Oh well. Makes it a bit more even, I suppose.” Dream said, sounding annoyed. Tubbo felt a little bit of relief sweep through him.

“Now that introductions are done, what is your proposed game?” Tubbo said, trying to keep his voice even. He didn’t want Dream proposing they recruit another Fae player.

“Manhunt.” Dream said, his voice filled with glee. The game was unfamiliar, but it wasn’t comforting how the rest of the Fae grinned.

“Manhunt?” Tubbo echoed. It sounded like a game Tommy would have loved. “What’s that? How do you play?”

“It’s my favorite game.” Dream said. He folded his arms. “One person tries to reach a goal while the others act as hunters whose goal is to stop them. I’ve been adding a new Hunter every time the game gets boring, I’m up to five. You’ll start at four.”

“Are you sure that’s fair?” Sapnap asked. The others stared at him and he shrugged. “I just don’t want the game ending immediately. I doubt this kid can fight the dragon and live, let alone with us chasing him.”

Tubbo choked a bit. A dragon? He didn’t like his odds against a dragon. The dragons in stories were terrifying, slaying legendary warriors and lurking in the most wild parts of the Veil.

Dream waved a hand. “Nah, I’ll downgrade it a bit. Instead of going after the dragon, his goal is to attain one Eye of Ender. As soon as he has one, the game ends.”

“Eye of Ender?” Tubbo asked. It sounded familiar but he couldn’t quite place it. Most stories with magical artifacts focused on ones that gave wealth, power, or beauty. It was definitely some kind of important magical artifact, likely connected to the Ender dragon that lived in the Veil-

Oh. Ah. That was probably the dragon they mentioned.

“It’s not really a mortal interest.” Dream said. He held up one hand. Tubbo felt his stomach lurch as he finally saw the bracelet clearly. It was a murky green reptilian eye that swiveled to look at him. “They look like these and are created by combining Blaze powder and an Ender Pearl.”

Sapnap whistled. “That’s not much better for a mortal than just going after the dragon.”

“Hush, you.” Dream said, waving a hand. “I’ll provide a tracker that’ll lead straight to nests of both monsters but it will be up to you to get the items and craft them.”

Tubbo frowned. So not only would he have to dodge the hunters, he’d presumably have to fight the monsters. It was doable but difficult. And he didn’t think Dream would offer a good alternative. “And you’re tracking me?”

“Now you’re getting it.” Dream said, pleased. “We have magic compasses to track the prey.”

Prey. He didn’t like the sound of that word. But that explained where Purpled might have seen a tracking compass.

It didn’t explain how Purpled managed to get one though.

“But you likely know where nests are already, right?” Tubbo said, shifting from one foot to the other. “Shouldn’t I get a head start then? To even it out?”

“Huh.” Dream said. He tapped at his mask, glancing at the other hunters. “It’s unorthodox. What do you guys think?”

“I’m against.” Sapnap said, stretching. He winked at Tubbo. “If the kid can make a wager with Philza, I think he’ll be just fine without a head start.”

There was no overlap between that whatsoever. Tubbo stuck his tongue out at Sapnap, the other brushing it off with a smirk.

“I think it’s a good idea.” Bad said. “It’s hard enough for Dream to get a good start with four hunters. No offense, but I don’t think he’ll get that far.”

He would take offense, but it was working for him so he’d take it. Tubbo looked at Antfrost who shrugged. “I think a head start would be a good idea.”

“So we have two for and two against.” Dream said, clapping his hands.

“Three for.” Tubbo said. He folded his arms, looking at Dream. It was essential that he got this head start. He was agile, and he had some ideas on how to win, but at such a short distance, he didn’t think he’d be able to run fast enough. “If I’m playing the game, I should get an opinion.”

“Fine then.” Dream said. “You’ll have a five minute head start. Do you want to accept the deal?”

Tubbo swallowed hard, looking between the hunters. “Nobody can interfere with the game but you guys. And no messing with the tracker or land so it’s impossible for me to reach the monsters.” He said. “And I get safe passage when I win.”

“If you win.”

“When I win.” Tubbo said, firmly. If he could win Schlatt’s trial, he could win this. He had to believe that, or he’d go mad.

“Alright, I’ll accept those terms.” Dream said, his tone saying he would grant it to avoid a fight but didn’t actually believe it. “The deal is made then. Agree?”

“Agree.” Tubbo said. The air shimmered with a sudden heatwave and the taste of blood and honey was heavy on his tongue.

“Then I’ll need a drop of blood.”

Tubbo flinched back. “Why would you need that?” He asked. Blood could be used in all sorts of enchantments, most of them horrifically gruesome.

“To torture you, why else?” Ant snarked. Tubbo took a step backwards, bringing his arms up to defend himself.

“Ant!” Bad scolded. It was in vain, the other hunters were already snickering. He looked back at Tubbo, looking exasperated. “We need blood to bind to the compasses.”

“Why?” Tubbo asked, eyes darting around. “I didn’t-“

-have to do that before. He wanted to say. But how could he explain that? Then they would ask when he did it before and why.

“Didn't what?” Dream asked, tilting his head to the side. Tubbo glanced away, refusing to meet his eyes.

“Didn't think I'd need to provide my blood.” He provided lamely. “How do I know you won't use it to do something bad?”

“Trust.” Dream said chirpily. He ducked under a pebble Bad threw at him. “We're not using it for anything bad, it's just to firmly anchor the enchantment over multiple compasses.”

That still sounded fake but Tubbo didn't know enough about magic to dispute it. He shifted slightly, uncertain. Fey couldn't lie so Dream had to be telling the truth about it.

“Fine.” He said reluctantly. He nearly jerked away as Dream grabbed his hand, forcing himself to hold still. Dream's touch was surprisingly gentle as the Fae stepped closer, pulling his hand up. The Fae's gloved hand was warm as if he'd been warming them over a fire.

“This won't hurt too much.” Dream said, far too cheerfully.

“Just do it already.” Tubbo said, resisting the urge to squeeze his eyes shut. He wanted to know what Dream was doing.

There was a flare of golden light around Dream's hand and Tubbo let out a soft gasp as he felt a pinprick of pain in his palm. It wasn't excruciating, more like the time he jabbed himself with a needle while Tommy was teaching him how to sew.

Dream turned his hand over. A crimson droplet of blood was already welling up from the puncture. There was another soft flare and the blood disappeared. Dream hummed before pressing a thumb over the mark.

Tubbo began to pull away but instead of pain, there was a flare of warmth. Bone deep like he was holding his hands over a warm fire.

Dream let go after a moment. “See? Not a scratch.”

And true to his words, there wasn't a puncture to be seen. Tubbo pulled his hand away, looking at it closely. If he held it in the sunlight just right, there was a tiny golden freckle.

“Aw, look at Dream being nice.” Sapnap said, teasingly. “What's next, you heal him when he scrapes his knee?”

“Shut up.” Dream snapped, spinning away from Tubbo. “Or I'm going to tell Bad what you did last midsummer.”

Bad's soft giggles cut off. “Wait, what did the muffin head do?” The Fae asked suspiciously.

“Nothing.” Sapnap said hurriedly, putting his hands up. “Dream's just joking around. Haha, what a card, this guy.”

Tubbo coughed softly. “Is the blood all you need?” He asked. He was kind of on a deadline right now.

“Yes, nothing else.” Dream said. “I can make the compasses while you get your head start. It won’t take too long.”

“And the tracker?”

“Follow the fireflies.” Dream said, pointing across the pond. Tubbo glanced up. Across the pond, glimmering flecks of light had appeared. “They’ll show you where you need to go.”

Tubbo took a deep breath. He didn’t know if he was ready for this. He didn’t know if he could ever be ready for this. So much was against him winning.

But Tommy was waiting for him.

“So.” Dream said. All the humanity seemed to seep out of the surrounding Fey making Tubbo shiver. He felt like a rabbit surrounded by hounds. “You better start running. Your time starts now.”

And Tubbo bolted towards the fireflies, far too aware of the eyes watching him go.

Chapter End Notes

Congrats to the comments that guessed the game! Luckily for Tubbo, he doesn’t have to fight a dragon!

Just face down monsters from his nightmares.

And also blazes and endermen. Those as well.

Molten Gold

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tubbo stumbled to a stop as soon as he was far enough away that he couldn't be seen. The footing was becoming more and more treacherous, the path lined with roots and large stones.

How much longer did he have left? It didn't feel like enough at all. He just needed a moment, just one, to get his thoughts in order.

He frowned, looking at the fireflies. This close, he could see that the fireflies themselves were more lightning than bug. Like the will-o-wisps he had heard of lurking in swamps.

"I think." Tubbo told it quietly. "I messed up."

He started walking again, zigzagging through the trees. What was he thinking? Dream and his friends had inhuman abilities and experience with this game. What did he have?

10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1-

Tubbo glanced up. He needed to keep an eye on the trees. Judging by the sounds he heard, they could travel through them as easily as walking. If he tried that, he'd fall. What did that leave him with?

He was shorter, for one. And normally he hated bringing that up, but right now it might help a lot.

Tubbo glanced to the side. Off the firefly path, to the right, the trees were closer together. Briars tangled among their roots forming a painful looking wall. He grinned.

Now to see if the fireflies would move.

"Do you have to stay in the same place?" He asked, feeling a bit foolish. In the stories, magic like this was alive.

Granted, those were little kid stories. Where princesses sang to ants and heroes bravely rescued a deer who'd save them down the line.

But surprisingly, the closest fireflies swarmed closer together, forming a rough sphere. It bobbed back and forth as if shaking its head in denial.

"Then can you chart a path that way?" Tubbo asked. If the Fey could track him, he was going to make it as difficult as possible.

The sparks spun around in the air for a moment. Tubbo jumped back with a yelp as sparks whirled past him. When he looked at the bramble path again, little sparks were perched on the thorny vines.

“Will that cost me anything?” He asked. He should have checked before. “Does this count as making a deal or whatever you’d like to call it?”

The last spark, hovering in front of his face, moved from side to side again. Tubbo nodded, turning to follow the new path.

It made sense, he supposed. The deal said that they would show him a path. It didn’t specify it had to be the same path Dream set, ergo, it wasn’t actually requiring a new deal.

Tubbo grinned mischievously. He could think of a lot of things he could do with that.

He dropped to his knees, crawling under a bramble. It was strangely nostalgic, similar to when he and Tommy would crawl under the orphanage fence to play in the woods. Tubbo, already the smaller one, could fit into the areas even Tommy couldn’t reach. He smiled at the memory.

The fireflies shifted, always in front of him. His jacket snagged on the bramble and he cursed, taking it off and stuffing it under his sweater. It wasn’t comfortable, but strangely, he didn’t want to lose it.

For one, it still had the letters he had to deliver. Tubbo frowned. He wasn’t looking forward to that. He had theories, but no solid evidence other than Quackity’s vague descriptions.

Bad seemed unlikely, he thought. That was one he could rule out. Quackity had called them lively and while Bad could fit that, he seemed a bit more calm than the others.

And probably Dream could be ruled out as well. Otherwise Schlatt or George would have likely mentioned it.

Unless it was a misdirection or reverse psychology or-

Tubbo grimaced as a branch smacked him in the face. By now, the brambles had grown to fill the space between the trees. The harsh sunlight was still bright though, nearly drowning out their thin shadows.

He froze when he heard a soft crackling sound behind him. Was five minutes up already?

“Come on, really?” He could hear Ant say. Tubbo fought to keep his breath even. He kept moving steadily, not wanting to alert them any more of where he was than he had to. “Over here?”

“I gave him a nice clear path.” Dream said. He could hear the biting amusement in his voice even from here. “I guess he didn’t want to use it.”

“Can’t you just move them though? C’mon man, I don’t want to go through there.” Sapnap complained. There was a shuffling sound and a curse as someone likely grabbed a branch.

“Don’t touch it!”

But Tubbo could only think about Sapnap's words. Would Dream do that? Erase this bramble path like it had never existed? Leaving him stranded and out in the open?

A spark bobbed in front of eyes and Tubbo focused on it. Determined, he kept crawling. If Dream did, he'd just have to make a new plan.

"No way, Snapmap." Dream said. His voice was still faint but Tubbo kept his guard up.

"But why?" Sapnap said, a bit of whining to his tone. "You don't go running through the brambles! I wanted to chase someone, not get stabbed!"

There was soft laughter, a muffled joke he couldn't quite hear. "Same reason I don't use forest magic during our games." Dream said. "It's less fun that way."

Tubbo shoved a spark of relief ruthlessly down. That wasn't confirmation Dream wouldn't use it and anyways, it was suspicious how loud he said that.

Almost as if he wanted Tubbo to hear and believe him.

"Then I'm just going to burn it." A short scuffle. He could hear Bad faintly speaking. "Give that back!"

"Stop burning down the forest! It's a pain to regrow!"

Tubbo rolled his eyes. They were centuries older than him and yet acted even younger. He had to drop to his belly to wriggle under a particularly low branch.

The scuffle stopped and there was a soft crackling sound. They must have stopped arguing and entered the bramble patch.

"Oh, kid!" Sapnap said in a sing-song voice. "Where are you? Come out, come out, wherever you areeee!"

"He's not a dog." Ant said. Worryingly, the voices were getting closer. "I doubt calling for him like that is going to work."

"You never know." Sapnap said. Tubbo held his breath, easing himself further into a particularly ferocious bramble with thorns as thick as his thumb. He had to contort himself awkwardly so they wouldn't tear into his skin.

Judging by the occasional curse and snapped admonishment from Bad, the Fey were being less careful.

"The compass says he's in here." Bad said. The voice came from overhead. The taller Fae must have stuck to the trees. "Do you see him?"

"If I did, there would be more screaming." Ant grumbled. "Ow! Dream, don't hit me with that!"

“Accident!” Dream said, far too cheerful for his words. Judging by a muffled curse, Ant thought so too.

Tubbo glanced around, thinking. There was no way he could exit the patch before one of them would catch up. He was far too slow, trying to dodge the thorns while they went right through them. Not to mention Bad lurking in the the trees.

So. How to escape?

The voices were beginning to come from different places. The difference was faint but noticeable. Sapnap’s voice had been closer while Ant and Dream were further away, more to the right.

They were spreading out. The compasses couldn’t be that exact so they must have spread out a bit to find him.

That gave him an idea.

Sapnap cursed again. This time, Tubbo snickered. It felt good to laugh a bit instead of constantly suppressing it.

There was a pause in the shuffling. Sapnap had heard him. “Hey, Dream.” Sapnap said, drawing out the name. “I bet I can find the mortal before you can.”

“Oh, really?” Dream asked, a note of amusement in his voice. Tubbo could see clearer forest in the distance, past the twisting vines. “I’d like to see that happen.”

“Really.” Sapnap insisted. “In fact, I’m almost certain I can. And then you’ll have to admit that I’m a better hunter than you.”

Tubbo rolled his eyes. Slowly, he eased closer to the edge of the bramble path, stopping just before he left the safety of the vines. Just mere feet separating him from freedom.

He couldn’t see Bad anywhere but that didn’t mean anything. The vines were still too thick of a canopy for him to see through to the tree branches.

“How about this. If you catch him first, I’ll say it.” Dream said. Tubbo wasn’t quite sure he was surprised they were betting about this.

Honestly, if he closed his eyes, it sounded like a normal game. As if they were in a normal forest, playing a game that would end in laughter, scuffed knees, and everyone fleeing back to the campsite before it got dark.

Tubbo knew better.

He listened as the shuffling got closer, reaching up and grabbing a vine with wickedly curved thorns. His heart was slamming against his ribs like it was trying to hammer through and flee without him.

“I’m going to hold you to that.” Sapnap said. Through the vines, Tubbo could see black and white fabric. “It’s going to be awesome.”

Every muscle in his body screamed at him to run but Tubbo forced himself to stay locked in place. Sapnap needed to get a little bit further. Just a little bit.

The brambles shuddered before moving and he could see the distinctive white bandanna. Sapnap looked up, grinning wickedly when he saw Tubbo.

Tubbo smiled calmly back, letting go off the vine and letting it snap back to where it was before. Right where Sapnap’s face was.

Sapnap screeched, rearing back as the thorns dug into his skin. “What the fuck!” He screamed, reaching up and trying to claw it away. The more he struggled, the more the brambles ensnared him.

Tubbo didn’t stay to watch. He bolted the last few feet, ripping his way through the vines. There was a spark of pain in his arm but he ignored it.

He threw himself to the side as a heavy weight crashed down, seeing the black and red out of the corner of his eyes.

The Fae loomed over him, clawed hands outstretched. Tubbo dodged backwards, closer to the brambles.

“Fuck this!” He heard Sapnap snarled. Bad made a jerky movement, interrupting his lunge to look at his friend.

“You can’t burn it-“ Bad began. Tubbo lunged forward, slamming his weight against Bad’s, forcing the Fae even more off balance. For a moment, those white eyes shot back to him, filled with confusion.

He jumped back, watching as Bad crashed into the bramble patch. Judging by the cursing, he had landed on top of Sapnap.

Some part of him, the sweet, civilized veneer he had crafted for adults, wanted to apologize. Instead, his fear overruled his manners, and Tubbo turned, bolting away from the bramble patch.

Behind him, he could hear Dream’s wheezy laughter. It spurred him to run even faster, the fireflies whirling past.

That wouldn’t buy him much time, Tubbo thought, his brain spinning through the calculation. Maybe a few minutes for Sapnap and Bad to untangle themselves. Add a few minutes for Dream and Ant too, to exit the bramble patch.

But it was his first victory in a game already stacked against him.

Tubbo skidded to a stop as a cloud of fireflies surrounded him. “What?” He whispered, eyes widening.

In front of him, the path branched into two. Fireflies lined both. Tubbo frowned, looking between them.

Two monsters. Two paths. The trick was which he should go to first. There were no identifying clues, not that they would help him much anyways.

Tubbo's eyes narrowed. Which path would Dream and his friends think he took? While the path on the right was clear, the left was littered with tree roots, making for a very difficult path.

Tubbo nimbly hopped up on a tree root, spreading his arms wide to stay balanced. He hopped to the next root, trying not to stumble. It might look a little silly, but this way, they wouldn't be able to see which way he'd go.

It wouldn't stall them for long, the compasses would help them pick a direction quickly. But it might give him a few precious seconds or minutes.

As soon as he was out of sight of the main path, he hopped off the root, staggering slightly as he hit the ground. Tubbo put a hand against a tree trunk to steady himself, only to quickly pull away with a wince.

"Did one of them-" Tubbo said quietly, looking at his arm. Crimson blood had streaked down his forearm. A wicked slash went across his palm, already beginning to scab over.

He must have been so hopped up on adrenaline, he didn't notice he had scratched his hand on a thorn. Tubbo paled slightly, glancing back down the path.

"Hopefully they don't notice." He mumbled, prodding at it lightly. It wasn't deep enough that a bandage would be necessary. Maybe he hadn't left any blood behind.

There was a lot of magic that could be done with a person's blood, and the compasses were practically the most friendly of them. He grimaced. But he didn't have time to go back and check.

Tubbo pressed his palm against his sweater, looking down the path. As he began to walk again, he could see the forest beginning to change.

Tree trunks began to blacken, the grass turning dry and dead. He could smell the scent of smoke in the air.

Eerily, the bright green leaves of the trees had not disappeared. Instead, the trees looked to be flourishing despite their trunks looking like charcoal. It was such a little thing, but it strangely grated on his nerves.

Because of this, he was already high strung when he heard animals beginning to move in the forest. Tubbo jumped as a nearby bush shook.

But none of the hunters lunged out.

"Is this path safe?" He wondered. It should have been. Were the hunters trying to scare him?

He steeled himself, continuing to walk down the path at a quick jog. If they were trying to scare him, he couldn't just race off in a new direction. He'd risk breaking a leg by stumbling into a ditch.

But strangely, the forest's inhabitants seemed to ignore him. Tubbo stumbled to a stop as a massive boar crossed his path. He could have reached out and touched it, but it didn't even look his way.

Or not a boar, he thought, shaking his head. It looked like something someone had come up with by hearing a story of a boar. It's leathery hide was an unnaturally even tan color with no blemishes. It had black bristly hair, white tusks, and came up to Tubbo's shoulders.

Tubbo shuddered when he saw those tusks. Some of the stories he heard, usually hanging around in a hidden spot where the adults couldn't see, could get downright gory.

The boar kept going, disappearing back into the undergrowth. Slowly, Tubbo picked up the pace again, keeping a wary eye on the forest. No other boars emerged but he occasionally heard the same crunching sound of something moving slowly through the undergrowth.

Was he moving towards the Blazes then? He knew a few stories about those monsters that were forged of fire and gold.

Most of them, like many of the Veil's inhabitants, could be summed up as 'going near them means a horrible death'.

But really, Schlatt had the same rating and he did fine.

He could tell he was getting closer though. In the distance, he could hear the crackling of flames and the soft whooshing sound of a breeze steadily feeding them.

Tubbo let the rhythm of his feet hitting the ground pull him into his thoughts. The Blazes could be dangerous. An aura of fire ignited when they sensed the presence of intruders.

And even worse, they were known for creating projectiles of lava rock, still filled with molten lava. If he got hit with one, the manhunt would be the least of his concerns.

Only one person had killed a Blaze successfully after extensive trading to get a magic potion that rendered them impervious to fire.

The story ended at that but Tubbo was reasonably certain he didn't have the time or ability to track down the Fae that made those potions. Already, the hunters had likely reached the fork in the trail.

So. Presumably to get the Blaze powder, he needed to kill one, or collect it somehow. But he needed more information. Perhaps it was something naturally shed?

Up ahead, he could see a break in the trees, the warm flickering glow of fire beyond it. It was beautiful in a strange way, like a stationary wildfire.

Tubbo slipped behind a tree instead of stepping into the clearing, peering out cautiously. His eyes widened in awe.

The clearing had held some kind of tower or building in the past. It had long since become ruins, the only remains being dark bricks and columns that littered the clearing.

In the center was a twisted mass of black stone that curled into itself, forming a forbidding cage. In the center, he could see a dim glow.

Above it was what looked to be some kind of mutant lantern. Golden rods spun lazily, unconnected to the head that hovered over them. The creature's eyes were closed, almost as if it was asleep.

Tubbo tilted his head. He didn't see any kind of fire aura. He must be just far enough away for it not to register him.

Slowly, he reached towards the ground, picking up a large smooth stone. Taking careful aim, he launched it at a tree on the opposite side of the clearing.

There was a loud thump as it hit the ground. The creature seemed to come to life in moments. The golden rods glowed briefly before bursting into flame, cloaking it in fire. Its head spun around, unseeing.

Lava rock splattered where the rock fell, lighting the twigs around it on fire. Tubbo watched it with wide eyes but the fire didn't spread any further. A side effect of the Summer Court?

But the Blaze didn't move anymore.

This was promising news. Clearly, the creature wasn't very intelligent, not even looking at the rock that had actually produced the sound. Instead, it hovered in place over the twisted cage.

If it wasn't for the soft whoosh of air feeding into it, he'd think it was a statue.

Tubbo pulled back, thinking. There was no way he could fight a Blaze. Agile or not, it delayed him for so long that the hunters would reach him.

And the hunters did not have to fear the fire.

The thought sparked something in his brain. He wasn't fire proof, but the hunters were. They could kill a Blaze.

His hand felt for the featherlight weight of the envelopes. It was risky. But he had a plan.

Chapter End Notes

Fortresses look quite a bit different in the Veil.

Trial by Fire

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

When the Hunters came upon him, Tubbo was carefully tending a small fire.

He had lit it with the twigs the Blaze set on fire, an incredibly terrifying experience in gathering. He had been convinced that at any moment, it would turn on him.

But he made it out with enough twigs to create a small fire just outside of the clearing. The heat was almost excruciating but Tubbo refused to stop stoking the fire.

He knew the moment the Hunters saw him. There was the soft crunch of boots, the muffled voices. When he looked up, he was surrounded.

The mystery of it amused them. It was easy to tell with their slow, precise movements. The way they watched him with the lazy grins of predators who were within striking distance but wanted to see what the prey would do.

“Did you get cold?” Dream said, tilting his head to the side. “The Summer Court is meant to be warm.”

“Just wanted to take care of a few things before getting the Blaze powder.” Tubbo said, humming slightly. He was pretty sure the calmness he was projecting would be seen through easily, admittedly, but the extra layer wouldn’t hurt.

It made the Fey even more wary as they spread out, looking around. What had Dream done in his manhunts to make them so cautious?

Sapnap stepped forward, grinning. “It’s the end of the line then.” He said. “Nothing personal.”

“You don’t want to do that.” Tubbo said. “By which I mean, you personally do not want to do that. This is not a general statement.”

And that knocked a crack in Sapnap’s composure. He glanced at Dream but Dream didn’t move, still watching Tubbo and his fire. “Why’s that?” He asked.

They were close enough now that if his plan failed, it would all be over. By now the Hunters had formed a loose circle around him and the Blaze was at his back. There was nowhere to run.

But Tubbo knew he hadn’t miscalculated.

The golden letter was as pristine as when he first got it, undamaged by his adventures. Tubbo grinned down at it. “Quackity would be so very disappointed if something was to accidentally happen to his letter for you.”

And before the Hunters could react, Tubbo held his hand out, holding the letter just barely out of reach of the hungry flames.

Sapnap's dark eyes blazed. "That's a lie." He said. But neither he or the Hunters came any closer.

Hook. Line. Sinker.

"Do you really want to risk that?" Tubbo said. "Quackity said you don't get to visit each other much and he worked hard on this letter. It was really sweet."

He could already feel a jittery sense of relief. He had been sitting by the fire for what felt like eternity, agonizing over whether his plan would work. If he could delay them long enough to reveal the letter and then hold it hostage.

"I say we capture him anyways." Ant said, beginning to take a step forward. "You can always visit Quackity later."

Tubbo forced himself to hold still. This had to go off perfectly and that meant sticking to his guns right now. He couldn't panic.

Sapnap whirled around, glaring at him. "Would you feel the same way if it was Velvet?"

Ant glared back before looking at Tubbo. "I could grab him before he could drop it-" Before he could finish, arms wrapped around him, holding him in place.

Bad's eyes were filled with concern. "Is it really one of Quackity's?" He asked. "Or is it a fake?"

Tubbo's eyes went a bit wide in surprise. He had expected Bad to hang back and Sapnap to intervene alone. This would be perfect.

"Doubt it." Sapnap said, his voice rough. Tubbo felt a flash of guilt before ruthlessly squashing it. "The envelope looks the same as his other letters."

"Then I can't let you go." Bad said to Ant. "This is important to Sapnap."

"And Quackity." Dream broke in. Tubbo had almost forgotten he was there. He had stood as still as a statue, never looking away. "Are you even able to destroy it?"

Tubbo lifted his chin. "Yes."

"And let's just say, I'm gonna be real mad if my letter gets destroyed."

Sometimes lies were necessary to succeed. Tubbo stared at Dream's mask unflinchingly with every scrap of conviction he could muster.

"Then what will you trade for it?" Sapnap said. He was staring at the letter with a look of longing. It looks like Quackity wasn't the only one who missed his sweethearts.

“This isn’t the deal.” Tubbo said evenly. “But how do you get Blaze powder?”

“You think I’d answer that?” Sapnap said with a scoff. Tubbo let his hand dip, just a fraction, pulling the letter away before it could be singed. “Okay! Fucking fine! You need to crush one of the rods.”

He was on thin ice with this. Threatening a Fae often popped up in stories and was just as often followed by a sadistic retribution from the Fae.

But he had nothing to lose right now

“Thank you.” Tubbo said. Judging by the angry state, that hadn’t mollified Sapnap one bit. “Then here’s the deal. Kill the Blaze and give me one of the Blaze rods.”

“And why would I let this happen?” Dream said. Tubbo had to force himself not to flinch. “This goes against my best interest of not allowing you to attain one.”

“Because Sapnap is your friend.” Tubbo said. He knew Dream would speak up about this, Sapnap was the easy catch and while the other Hunters were harder to nail down, Dream seemed like the kind of person who’d poke a bear just to see what happened. “And I presume that you wouldn’t want to hurt him like that.”

“Maybe I would.” Dream said lightly.

“Maybe you wouldn’t.” Tubbo said, his eyes stony. “I’m not here to debate what if’s. In exchange for the letter’s safety, I want my deal. And a head start.”

“Not happening.” Dream said. Sapnap reluctantly nodded. “I’m... open to hearing about the prior deal you proposed. But there will be no more head starts in this game.”

Oh well, he couldn’t win anything. He had only tossed it out to test the waters and get his foot wedged firmly in the door. Anything else after proposing a head start should sound more reasonable.

“I want you to kill the Blaze without endangering or trying to capture me.” Tubbo said. “And I want the Blaze rod from it. In return, I will return the letter once I get the Blaze rod.”

“Nothing else?” Dream said. He sounded faintly skeptical. “I would have thought you’d want the Blaze rod and the pearl.”

He had actually thought of that at first. It had been a tempting prospect. In one fell swoop, he could cut almost all of the game.

The head start could have been his too. All he had to do was lower the letter a little and let Sapnap fight to get him what he wants.

The sense of power was almost heady.

But he couldn’t when he saw the look on Sapnap’s face and the concern in Bad’s eyes. Even the slight reluctance in Ant’s movements and the stiffness of Dream’s shoulders.

That would be pushing it too far. Tubbo knew he had to draw lines in the sand or he'd become an even bigger monster than the Fey.

Sapnap look frustrated. "Deal." He bit out, the words as sharp as a knife. Tubbo could feel the temperature jolt up a bit higher. It was miserably hot now.

The other Hunters didn't answer for a moment. Tubbo waited, hoping it would work.

"Deal." Bad said, releasing Ant. Tubbo stiffened a bit, watching for signs that the deal would fail and the other would lunge.

Instead, Ant was still except for his lashing tail. "Deal." He said, clearly a bit frustrated.

Only Dream was left. Tubbo looked at him, nervous. This was the person he was most worried about. Dream was a wildcard. Would his clear competitiveness win out over his concern for his friend?

Dream rocked a bit on his feet, drawing out the moment further. "Deal." He said. Tubbo rolled his eyes.

"Then you have a Blaze to kill, I guess." He said, feeling a bit of the heady rush of a deal. It was almost dizzying this time, the crackle of magic in the air.

Was it because there was more Fey agreeing? Or was it something purposeful they could control?

He took a deep breath to steady his nerves. The letter felt heavy in his hands. He hoped Quackity wouldn't be too mad about this. He seemed like the type of person who would find this kind of trick amusing, but you never knew.

"I suppose we do." Dream said. There was a touch of amusement to his voice. But Sapnap pushed past him.

"It's mine." He said, glaring at Tubbo. Tubbo let his stare head on. Sapnap cracked his knuckles before fire lit in his palms. "I need to blow off some steam anyways."

While Tubbo knew he was safe, had noted his safety in the deal, he still shuddered a bit as Sapnap walked past him. He could practically reach out and touch him.

The Fae didn't try to snatch at the letter. With the deal already made, Tubbo was fairly certain Sapnap wouldn't want the risk.

Quackity was lucky to have someone so devoted. He almost felt bad about abusing that. The key word being almost.

Reluctantly, Tubbo twisted around slightly so he could watch. He didn't want to expose his back but when else would he get to see something like this? And they couldn't endanger or capture him so it should be fine, right?

“This is stupid.” Ant mumbled. His tail was still lashing when Tubbo looked over. “There’s no way you could escape after the deal is finished.”

Tubbo hummed, neither agreeing, not disagreeing. An hour ago, he would have said he had no chance of making it to one of the monster nests, let alone getting his hands on one of the ingredients. Life was a surprise like that.

He watched as the Blaze lurched to life, the corona of flames beginning to reignite.

But Sapnap moved, fast as a striking snake. He seemed to cross the clearing in two steps, reaching for the Blaze’s head. Tubbo shuddered as the Blaze wailed, its red flames falling back against an onslaught of golden flames.

But how was that possible? The Blaze was a creature of fire, wore it like a cloak, and yet here it was, cowering away from Sapnap who had neither sword nor brass knuckles.

“Summer Fey have some of the hottest flames around.” Bad said as if he could read Tubbo’s thoughts. “And Sapnap is one of the hottest even within our group. He’s second only to Dream.”

There was such a strong undercurrent of fondness that Tubbo nearly did a double take. Were Bad and Sapnap related somehow? There wasn’t much of a resemblance but there was an earnest kind of love in Bad’s voice like a parent showing off their child.

The Blaze wailed again and Tubbo flinched as hot magma hit the ground across the clearing. Sapnap didn’t flinch at the droplets landing on his skin, fire erupting from one hand before he spun away again, dodging the next shot.

He almost made it look effortless. Tubbo had calculated his chances against the Blaze at an optimistic thirty-seven percent chance. But Sapnap whirled and ducked, flames lashing out again and again.

And it was working. The Blaze was beginning to sink towards the ground. Its flames weren’t quite as bright before and the rods spun slowly.

Tubbo felt himself grin a bit, excited at the prospect of getting his hands on his next quest item.

“I would have done it faster.” Dream said, not dismissive but not entirely engaged either. “But he’s blowing off steam right now.”

“That’s right.” Bad said. “And it doesn’t matter about the length of time it takes, only that it’s completed satisfactorily.”

Tubbo wanted to point out that the length of time did matter but he also didn’t want to give them any ideas. If they tried to delay it, he really may need to use the second letter as collateral.

And that, he didn’t want to do. It was still risky, but it could provide some security while in the Spring Court.

He swallowed hard, resisting the urge to look at the jacket. He didn't want to risk a mysterious accident happening to the jacket and the other letter going missing.

"Do you kill these a lot?" Tubbo asked. They certainly seemed very familiar with them. Sapnap's strikes seemed to land on the places that affected the Blaze the most.

"We often collect Blaze powder for various projects." Dream said. Tubbo fidgeted a bit with his sweater, surprised. He wouldn't have thought Dream would tell him. "They're particularly useful in potions."

"Dream." Ant hissed, his fur puffed up. "He doesn't need to know that."

"What is he going to do with it?" Dream said. Somehow, his mask almost looked like he was mocking Tubbo. "That's only one step of many, and not even the full step."

Tubbo glared at him but ultimately and reluctantly dismissed the few budding plans he had. It would take far too long to learn how to make a potion.

Not to mention, he was certain they would kill him for even trying. Fey were possessive of their property and the secret to potions certainly fell under that. Some people had cobbled together close replicas but could never quite attain the efficiency and magic of a true potion.

Purpled and Ranboo might know but he couldn't exactly walk back and ask for recipes.

It was still a bit tempting though. Even just one potion from the Fey could bring in enough coin for Tommy and him to live comfortably for the rest of their lives.

They could even move out of their cabin and travel to the cities that were warded to the best of human capability and laced with iron. While the protections weren't absolute, it would be safer.

Then again, they had avoided the cities for a reason. Paying for safety brought out the nastiness in people.

But still. There was that drive in Tubbo that pushed him to go further. To push back against what Dream had said.

He shook his head, glancing up again. Dream was staring at him, his mask tilted to the side and his fingers tapping the edge. He was thinking again. Terrible news.

Before Tubbo could come up with a distraction, there was a surprised cry behind him. He twisted around to look back, his eyes widening.

The fire in the twisted cage flared bright. Once. Twice. The air shimmered with heat waves and Tubbo felt himself melt a little at the sheer wave of heat that hit him.

Right as he thought it was getting unbearable, his head growing dizzy, a cool breeze twisted around him.

Tubbo stiffened, glancing around wildly. A breeze made him think of one person.

But there was no sign of Schlatt. Not even a single dry leaf. His eyes landed on Dream who was practically radiating smugness.

It was almost infuriating and impressive how the Summer Fey didn't acknowledge the heat. Tubbo had rolled up his sleeves and pants and still felt like he was going to drown in sweat.

Meanwhile, Dream and Bad were both wearing heavy cloaks and Ant had fur. Sapnap was even wearing long sleeves and pants while on fire.

It was maybe, just a little bit, cool.

"You said to keep you from getting endangered." He said. "I figured you dying of heatstroke right now counts as endangerment."

Tubbo bit back on the urge to thank him. It was against his sense of manners, but he didn't want to be snarled into a life debt. While it was part of the deal, Fey were experts at loopholes.

He nodded briefly, glancing back at the clearing. His eyes went wide.

A second Blaze hovered in the air, already lit up in a corona of flame. Bad cursed, darting into the clearing before it could go for Sapnap's briefly unprotected back.

"How is that possible?" Tubbo asked, staring at the clearing. The Blaze hadn't been there before and there was no way it could have entered the clearing with nobody noticing.

"This is their nest." Ant said, sounding bored. He rolled his eyes when Tubbo looked at him. "Blazes aren't born or made. They're created when the magic level in their nest rises high enough to produce one."

"Normally, it's a fairly slow process." Dream said. He looked like he was watching something far calmer like a freshly painted wall drying, not a fierce battle between his friend and a fiery monster. "But ambient magic does include any Fey nearby and we produce quite a bit of it."

Tubbo frowned, glancing at the clearing. Sapnap and Bad moved in terrifying sync while dealing with the Blazes. But what would happen if a third spawned?

Probably nothing, he reminded himself. While Bad and Sapnap were moving fast, neither looked scared or worried. They moved like they had done this a thousand times before.

But there was still that small bit of concern.

"Should we move further away then?" Tubbo asked. "So the spawn rate slows down again?"

The two Fey stared at him for a long moment. Tubbo stared back, not quite sure what to make of their reactions.

"Why do you care?" Dream asked. Tubbo blinked, confused. "It would be in your best interest if one of them was to get hurt or incapacitated right now."

That was true. One or even two Hunters down would make this process far easier on him.

But unfortunately, as much as Tubbo had tried to get rid of it, he was as Tommy would say, a soft boy at heart.

“There’s a difference between a fair loss and what that would be.” Tubbo said finally. As hard as it was, he had to draw lines. “And if I was to condone that, I’d be no better than a monster.”

“True enough, I suppose.” Dream said. “It’s just surprising to hear that you’re concerned about them.”

Tubbo shrugged, not quite sure what to say. It was weird dealing with the Fey. He knew they were the ones who could play the truth like a violin. They were the villains of almost every story.

But here in the Veil, they had their own stories. Sapnap had a sweetheart. Bad was willing to fight his friends to protect that happiness. Even Schlatt was different from the stories’ flat villain.

It made them more real. And while Tubbo would never forgive the Winter Court, he couldn’t condemn an entire people because he hated them.

It didn’t mean he’d trust them though.

“It’s complicated.” Tubbo said, leaving it at that. “But should we move away?”

“No point to it.” Ant said, shaking his head. “Sapnap and Bad alone are enough to have a couple spawn. But Blazes are slow moving, all they need is one rod so they can leave afterwards.”

That made him feel a bit bitter. Though Tubbo could quite see how the Blazes were slow moving. They looked to be moving quite fast, gliding through the air, and their lava shots were dangerous.

“They might look a bit faster to you because you’re a mortal.” Dream said, his voice dripping with honeyed condescension. The words themselves weren’t an insult but he could read between the lines.

But Tubbo still tucked away the new information. He had learned more about the Fey in the last few days than years of stories. He didn’t know if it would all be useful, but information was always worth remembering.

There was a cry of alarm and Tubbo looked up, back towards the clearing. Had another been created?

Too late, he saw that one had drifted further, almost out of the clearing. Its dark crystalline eyes locked onto him.

They’re not very intelligent, he thought. They’ll go after whoever gets their attention.

He threw himself backwards but already he knew it was too late. The familiar glow was already forming, magma condensing out of magic. A clinical part of his brain told him that even if he got clear of the bomb, he wouldn't escape the splatter range.

He had gotten so far.

Was this what karma was like?

The glow became white hot. Tubbo closed his eyes, nearly blinded by the brightness, and waiting for the searing burn of impact.

There was a sound like snapping twigs and a hollow shriek. Tubbo opened his eyes with a gasp, feeling like he hadn't breathed in far too long.

A familiar green cloak was in front of him. Dream was holding the creature's head in his hands, watching as it rapidly deteriorated. Magma dripped off his cloak like water droplets.

He turned slightly, meeting Tubbo's shocked gaze. "I told you I could kill them faster." He said. Under pressure from his hands, the head crumbled to pieces. "No Blaze rod, unfortunately."

"Yeah, there wouldn't be after you practically tore it apart." Ant said with a snort. Tubbo was barely listening, not sure what to say.

Dream had saved his life. He hadn't needed to. In fact, it would actively benefit him if Tubbo was to die and lose. At the very least, if the splatter had struck him, he would have been crippled. An easy target.

But maybe he thought the chase and forfeit was worth it? Who knows what Dream was planning. All he knew was that yet again, he had to bite back the urge to thank someone.

After all, life debts were nasty business. Except for the one between him and Tommy which was really just him and Tommy deciding the other's life was the most important. That was fine though. He and Tommy had been together for so long that it was natural. He definitely didn't feel a bit worried about Tommy taking it too far to help him. It was fine.

"They don't always drop Blaze rods?" Tubbo heard himself say. Fumbling for anything to distract himself.

Dream let the pieces drop to the ground and Tubbo watched as they seemed to melt back into the earth. "It's always a chance they won't. Sometimes the earth takes all the magic back and leaves nothing behind."

"And it definitely wasn't partially due to Dream tearing it apart." Ant said. "I haven't seen you pull out that trick in a long time."

"I'm sitting here only a few feet away from my prey and yet unable to capture them." Dream said. The dark eyes of his mask met Tubbo's. "As Sapnap said, I have a lot of steam to blow off."

Tubbo flinched back slightly. What Dream did to the Blaze was a chilling reminder of his own power. Even now, Sapnap and Bad were still chipping away at the Blaze.

Maybe they were having fun. Maybe they were blowing off some steam. But Dream had still torn one apart like so much paper.

With a shiver, Tubbo wondered if he had done that to humans before.

“Anyways.” Dream said. Tubbo’s head jerked up. “Sapnap and Bad are nearly done so we’ll need to see if it’ll drop one.”

Tubbo nodded slowly, looking back at the clearing. This was one of the risky parts. As soon as he had the Blaze rod, their fragile peace would end.

He took a deep breath, trying to push away the fear. He had to trust in his plan right now. He had back ups too.

Sapnap lunged forward, slamming a flaming knife between the creature’s eyes. There was a final cracking sound like a dry twig being snapped.

The Blaze almost looked like it was crumbling in on itself. The fire went out in a puff of ash and the rods fell from the air. The head fell with them, the eyes dark and unseeing.

Tubbo watched as one by one, the rods began to dissolve. He wanted to race over there and snatch one up. But who knows if it would survive? He’d just be jeopardizing his deal and opening a loophole to take advantage of.

There were only two left. The head crumbled into the earth, leaving them behind. One began to dissolve away into nothing. It was unlikely the other wouldn’t follow its path.

Maybe not this time, Tubbo thought. That was disappointing. He really wanted to be back in the game by now, if only to end this tense wait.

Sapnap grinned instead, snatching up the Blaze rod. “It’s perfectly fine.” He declared. Indeed, unlike the others, the Blaze rod still shone bright.

Tubbo took a deep breath, looking at the Hunters. There was a feral sort of energy building up in the clearing like the gaze of predators that had been looking away had now returned. Bad didn’t put down the sword he had been using against the Blaze and Sapnap’s other hand was still glowing with fire. He knew if he looked at Dream and Ant, they would be ready to continue too.

The moment he took the Blaze rod, the truce would end and the game would resume.

Tubbo smiled. Just a little bit. He was kind of looking forward to this next part.

I just want to say, I'm so happy you guys are enjoying this fic! I did not expect it to get this popular!

Eternal Twilight

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tubbo looked up at Sapnap, holding his free hand out. “Pass me it then.” He said.

“No.” Sapnap said, holding the rod tightly. It shimmered brightly in his hands. “I want the letter first.”

“No.” Tubbo said. He tilted his chin up, pretending not to notice the other Hunters circling around him. “The deal ends when I get the Blaze rod. So that’s when you get your letter.”

“And what happens if I wait?” Sapnap said, his eyes burning. He must have really annoyed him. “Last I remember, you’re on a time limit.”

“I mean, go for it big man.” Tubbo said. He had to try hard to not let any of his worry seep into his voice. “I’ve still got a little over a week to go and one Court after this.”

He smiled, trying to project an ease he wasn’t quite feeling. He didn’t want to lose any more time. Every second counted in this challenge. But if he showed that, they’d take advantage of him and that would be far worse.

A few moments passed. Tubbo idly counted the leaves on a nearby tree. Bad awkwardly coughed. Behind him, he could hear shuffling.

Sapnap let out an annoyed sigh. “Fine! Come take it then!” He said. From the look on his face, he expected Tubbo to deny the request.

“Okay.” Tubbo said, standing. He brushed the ashes off his pants with his free hand before walking over.

Walking closer to Sapnap was like walking over to a bonfire. The Fae radiated heat all over, not just from the fire dancing on his hand.

This next part was pretty risky. But it was vital that he’d pull it off perfectly. Behind him, he could hear the crunching as the others circled in tight. Sapnap grinned down at him.

Tubbo reached out, firmly grasping the Blaze rod. Pretending like he didn’t notice how Sapnap’s other hand was creeping towards him. He smiled.

And then turned and threw the letter towards the fire.

It wasn’t a great throw by any measure. Judging by the slight breeze, the letter would harmlessly fall short.

What mattered was that Sapnap believed it could burn.

Tubbo ripped the Blaze rod out of Sapnap's grip, dodging to the side as Sapnap barreled past him towards the fluttering letter. There was a choked off gasp and a crunching sound as he crashed into Bad who had moved at the same time.

Taking advantage of the moment, Tubbo sprinted forward, charging right through the clearing, towards the nest. Around him, the fireflies flickered like comets.

"Should we give him a head start?" He heard Dream say over the pounding in his ears. The Fey could move a lot faster than he could, an intrusive thought reminded him.

"Why drag this out any longer?" Ant said. Tubbo could hear the crunching of footsteps as they rushed after him, their long strides eating up the ground.

"Stop running!" Dream said, a bit of a wheeze to his words. Tubbo was glad he found this so funny. Really. It didn't fill him with frustrated rage. He was a nice person who never got angry at all.

You know what? He was so nice, he'd listen to Dream.

Tubbo stopped, flinging himself backwards. His back slammed into Dream's forcing his momentum backwards as well. There was a soft choked noise and Tubbo helped as someone crashed into them.

He stumbled, throwing himself forwards again before they could grab him. Tubbo glanced back.

Dream and Ant were cursing, shoving each other as they fought over who could stand first. "That was a dirty trick." Dream said. "But you know that won't slow us down for long."

"No." Tubbo said. He could feel the heat beginning to rise, starting a countdown he had memorized from the first event. "But I think they can."

Ant's eyes went wide, cursing as he tried to scramble up. Dream remained still, blank mask fixated on him. Tubbo took a few steps back.

"What was it that you said? The more magic power, the more that is created?" There was a soft whoosh of air. "Having the Summer King should mean quite a lot of power."

Tubbo turned, sprinting away as the nest blazed to life. In the corner of his eyes, he could see the fusion of magic, rods spinning out of thin air. There were clearly far more than the one or two that had first appeared.

Tubbo flinched as a gust of hot air flew past him. There was the clash of a blade behind him, the scream of an injured Blaze.

But he only had eyes for the shimmering fireflies and the path they marked out. He knew that if he hesitated, even for a moment, either a Blaze would kill him or he would be caught by a Hunter.

He threw himself to the side, hearing the hiss of hot air just in time. The lava projectile flew past him, splattering over the ground. He had to hop over the dribbles of still molten magma.

By the time the next one had struck a tree, he was already a few feet inside the tree line and still going.

And yet, Tubbo thought, though the Blazes should have firmly distracted the Hunters, he still felt like someone was watching him.

It wasn't too much of a surprise. He'd be more surprised if someone wasn't watching him. It felt like he was the new entertainment for all the Courts.

Tubbo grimaced to himself, not liking to be thought of as entertaining. He couldn't hear anyone following him though so the plan was working. That made him feel a bit better.

He had considered refusing to take the Blaze rod but something warned him not to. After all, there was nothing stopping them from forcing it upon him, leaving him in an even worse position.

Tubbo shook his head, veering to avoid a tree. Not that he had been in a great position to start with.

His first plan had been to throw the letter, trip whoever was in front, and run back towards the bramble patch. It wasn't a fantastic plan, but it was what he had to work with.

And then Dream had told him about the effect they had on the nest and Tubbo had been inspired. With this plan, he didn't have to outrun them, he just needed to get them in the right place.

Hopefully, it would win him time.

He sighed, wishing he could slow down from his sprint. There was a stitch in his side and the ever present heat felt like it was sucking the energy out of him.

But he couldn't. Who knows how quickly they would defeat the Blazes? It could be that his small lead is already shrinking.

Really, Tubbo thought. Would it hurt him to be a bit more optimistic than logical sometimes?

Yeah. It probably would. At least if he hadn't been so optimistic, he would have realized what was going on with Tommy instead of waiting until the last moment to do something.

Tubbo let out a choked wheeze, his lungs feeling uncomfortably tight from all the ash in the air.

He wasn't going to dwell on this again. He'd drive himself insane by doing that. What was done was done and unfortunately, time travel didn't exist.

And if it did, Tubbo thought wryly, Philza probably would have made sure I never met Tommy. He was already trying to make sure Tommy didn't remember our past together.

The very thought of it made his stomach sick. Did Tommy still remember him now? Or would it be like Schlatt said, his memories of being mortal already fading away?

...Would he remember him if he won? Or would he be taking home a shell?

Tubbo shook his head, running faster. He wasn't going to dwell on this. What mattered was getting Tommy back. He could deal with the consequences afterwards.

And he knew there would be consequences. A breeze rattled the branches nearby and Tubbo shivered.

"There was no way Dream would let Schlatt interfere." Tubbo whispered between wheezing breaths. "Their Courts aren't even allies."

But it didn't stop him from getting jittery any time a breeze appeared, remembering how Schlatt had been tracking him. It wouldn't surprise him if Dream was increasing the breeze just to mess with him.

He tucked the Blaze rod into his sweater, none of his pockets being large enough to hold it. It tingled in his hand like the continuous stinging of a sunburn.

Tubbo forced himself to watch the scenery flashing by, hoping to find something interesting to focus on. The ash on the ground was beginning to dwindle, revealing dry scrubby grass.

And there were less trees, Tubbo's noted, a bit uncomfortable. He was pretty sure he could dodge the Hunters in narrow spaces but the trees around him were beginning to thin out, leaving more open room.

There was a soft crunch and Tubbo slowed a bit, looking down. Instead of the mixture of grass and moss he had seen before, or the ashy gravel, he was stepping on sand.

And not just any sand. The kind of golden sand that appeared in the beautifully illustrated books in shop windows. It was so fine looking that Tubbo was certain if he was to sift through it, he wouldn't find a single pebble.

In the back of his mind, an old memory surfaced.

A desert with no end in sight, the kind stories were made of. "You have to be kidding me." Tubbo mumbled, looking up. After seeing the lush forest, he had assumed the desert some stories mentioned was either a metaphor or further away.

And yet, the tree line came to an abrupt end ahead of him. Golden sand covered the ground and a dry heat had filled the air.

"Are you sure we're going the right way?" Tubbo said. The fireflies flickered but remained in front of him.

It wasn't that he disliked deserts. But as he thought before, a desert wouldn't give him many hiding spaces. Which was likely why Dream picked it.

There were no brambles to hide in now.

Tubbo spelled his shoulders, picking up his pace again. He could make it work. He just needed to see what he was working with and then come up with a plan.

That didn't stop him from gasping as he broke out through the trees.

A golden desert stretched out in front of him, looking like it reached the horizon. Gentle rolling dunes replaced the trees. In the very distance, faintly silhouetted against the sky, he saw dark towers.

Instead of the constant harsh sunlight, the desert was shrouded in a thick twilight. The heavy sort of darkness filled with a languid heat that came in at the end of summer days.

Tubbo took a step back. Sunlight. Step forward. Twilight. His lips twitched.

This made absolutely no sense.

The sky was too hazy to see more than the smallest suggestion of stars. But what he saw didn't look like any constellations he had seen before, even in the Winter Court.

The End. So named because of the amount of adventurers it had killed. Tubbo smiled ruefully. He wasn't even surprised that the Endermen were here.

It fit the descriptions he had as tall, eternally shadowed beings. They roamed the landscape, endlessly shifting sand and dirt to satisfy their unknown desires.

Absolutely delightful. And if the Blazes were any indication, he needed to kill one. Tubbo was really hoping one of the Blazes had got a shot on Dream.

"Let's find one first." Tubbo said with a sigh, following the fireflies in front of him. Worryingly, he didn't hear the Hunters nearby. It made him pick up his pace again, fighting for footing in the unstable sand.

He didn't want to see the Hunters. But he also worried when he couldn't see them. Because that meant they could be planning something. Tubbo sighed deeply.

He was finally away from the Fey and he didn't even get any time to relax. He didn't want to relax with the mission he was on, but still.

There was a flickering light in front of his eyes. "Are we here?" Tubbo said. More flickering. Carefully, he clambered up the dune, hiding just below the crest of it.

He was closer to the dark pillars now, enough so he could see how they looked over the land. But closer still, he could see a dark figure picking its way across the sand.

Tubbo tilted his head, watching it as he wracked his brains on weaknesses.

He remembered you weren't supposed to look them in the eyes for... reasons. It made them murderous. He didn't even know the exact reason. Just about every story had a convenient

explanation that made no sense.

But that wasn't the only thing, Tubbo thought. It was an old story, one he heard from a fisherman who claimed he had lost an arm to a shadow person. He claimed it had melted when he pushed it off the pier into the ocean.

The sand shifted under his grip. Dry sand. Not even a hint of moisture. The whole living in a desert thing was making a lot more sense now.

He wasn't sure he could deal enough damage to overcome its natural defense. Tubbo grimaced a bit.

First plan, was there a way he could acquire water? Or should he just grab a big stick? He didn't really like the idea of using brute force against this kind of monster.

Tubbo hummed. Because he didn't see a nest, he wouldn't be able to use the creation trick again. He'd have to collect a Pearl before a hunter caught up.

But did he have to kill it?

He tilted his head to the side, watching as the creature walked across the desert. It didn't look like the Blaze did, mindlessly floating until an enemy came near. There was thought in its steps, in how it would pause to look at the ground and keep moving.

If it was intelligent, he really didn't want to kill it. That would be far too cruel. If it was necessary, maybe, but otherwise? No way.

Tubbo stood up, nearly slipping down the slope. He put his arms out, turning it into a smoother slide.

Definitely more safe than jumping down a rock face, he thought with a wry smile.

He kept his eyes on the ground, walking carefully in the direction of where he last saw the Enderman. There was an odd buzzing sound as he grew closer, a hissing static that stubbornly stayed on the edge of his hearing.

He stopped as long dark limbs entered his small field of vision. This close, and he could see how sickeningly wrong the proportions were, stretched out like a reed.

"Hello?" He said. Did Enderman even speak the language of humans?

There was a soft croaking sound, making Tubbo jump. It was like someone took the croak of a frog and twisted it beyond recognition.

Negotiation first, Tubbo reminded himself. He had to make sure every option was explored.

The static increased until it felt like a presence in his head, drowning out everything else. Tubbo let out a small gasp, taking a step back.

"Greetings."

“Uh, hi.” Tubbo said. He winced at his lapse. “Do you, by any chance, have a spare Ender pearl?”

Well, that came out weird. It sounded like he was asking to borrow a cup of sugar or something ridiculous like that. But he wasn’t quite sure how else to put it and he was really pressed for time.

”Depends.”

“On what?” Tubbo said. If it was night time? If he possessed some super rare artifact? If he could pay them? What was with Fey and being dramatically vague?

Okay, yeah, he did the same thing. But he liked to think it was charming when it was him. Was this how Tommy felt when he was being charmingly vague?

...surely not, right?

He shook his head slightly as the static increased again. It seemed to be a side effect of telepathy.

”If you are a friend of the Enderians.”

“And what would that require?” Tubbo said warily. He didn’t have enough time left to pursue a massive quest. It was really unlikely someone wasn’t on his trail by now.

”It’s simple, do one small thing for me. And I will mark you as a friend. Then I will give you the Pearl you want.”

“What’s that?” Tubbo said. Why wouldn’t the Enderman just come out and say it?

”I want dirt.”

“You want what?” Tubbo said, trying to wrap his mind around it. Dirt? Really? “Like, fancy blessed dirt or something?”

”No, just some dirt. I’ll even accept a tiny clump. If you really want to go above and beyond, you can get me some with the funny thing you people call grass attached.”

“Are you going to attack or trap me or something? Will this kill me?” Tubbo asked. This really couldn’t be it, right? No Fey would ask for dirt.

”No! It’s perfectly safe as long as you don’t accidentally trip over someone and offend them. I just want dirt.”

“I- okay. Deal, I guess.” Tubbo said. There didn’t look to be anything wrong with the deal. But that just made it even odder.

”I’ll wait here then. Come back soon.”

“...I’ll try.” Tubbo said, turning back and trudging up the slippery slope. On one hand, he was grateful that this quest would be so easy. It meant he could quickly grab the next item he needed.

But it really made his paranoia raise hell. He knew that some Fey only required simple objects, but dirt? With maybe some grass attached?

Whatever, who was he to judge. Tubbo took a deep breath, tucking his hands behind his head. He wasn’t going to look a gift horse in the mouth.

Luckily, he hadn’t drifted too far from the edge of the forest. As soon as he climbed to the top, he could see the distant smudge of trees. Tubbo broke into a sprint, paranoia briefly making way for excitement.

Soon, he’d be done with the Summer Court! And then he would need to visit the Spring Court and if all went well, he’d be back to see Tommy before the time limit was up.

Tubbo smiled. He couldn’t wait to bring Tommy home.

He slowed to a jog as he approached the trees, knelling down at the place where the sand gave way to dirt. Tubbo poked it cautiously.

No monsters. And no curses. Carefully, he dug out a piece the size of his palm, grass blades and even a little moss still clinging onto it.

Now, he just needed to get this safely back to the Enderman and collect the Ender Pearl. Then, this ridiculous game would finally be over.

Tubbo stood up, stretching slightly and wincing at the protesting from his muscles. It wasn’t enough to slow him down but it was an ever present pain that made him want to crawl into his bed and sleep.

He snorted, his mood still light. Preferably without Tommy randomly opening the windows at night.

Tubbo turned back, jogging up the hill. So far, everything looks to be going well! Be just needed to deliver the dirt and he’d get the Ender Pearl he wanted.

He got about one more moment of contentment before the Veil reminded him why he hated this game. As he reached the top of the slope, movement from the edge of the forest caught his eyes. As if in a trance, Tubbo turned back to look.

A bright green figure emerged from the edge of the woods, masked face looking directly at him. In their hands, he could still see the faint glimmer of a compass.

It looked like his head start had finally run out.

Tubbo turned, sprinting down the slope and up the other side. One more sand hill and he could make it to the Enderman. It would be extremely difficult for Dream to cover that distance in such a short amount of time.

At least, that was what he was hoping.

In the corner of his eye, he saw something flicker. He couldn't see Dream anymore.

But Tubbo felt his heart lift as he neared the top. Just a bit longer!

There was a soft whooping noise and the sound of a bubble popping. And in a flurry of purple sparks, Dream appeared in front of him.

Tubbo skidded to a stop, flinging himself back before outreached hands could grab him. He felt his heart plummet. Dream was between him and the escape route.

"How did you do that?" Tubbo said, wheezing a bit. He needed to play for time, at least enough to think of what to do next.

"Ender Pearl." Dream said, casually. "There is an area within the Nether area where Enderman will occasionally show up in. Too bad your fireflies didn't lead you there."

Tubbo flushed red. "You said they'd lead me to the nests!"

"And they did, didn't they?" Dream said. Fireflies swirled around his head, eerie shadows flickering across it. "They did quite a good job of guiding you to the End."

So there was a loophole. He knew there would be. But this one might be doable. He just needed to find his angle to get past.

"Where's your friends?" Tubbo asked, looking around. He couldn't see anyone.

Dream waved a hand. "I decided to go ahead. The nest was spawning waves of Blazes so they decided to keep blowing off steam there."

Well, that was a bit of a relief. It didn't guarantee they wouldn't arrive but at least he wasn't dealing with four Fey right now. "What do you want?" Tubbo asked, gritting his teeth.

"Follow me." Dream said, waving his hand. "I want to show you something."

Tubbo held his ground. "I have to do something first." He said stubbornly. "Won't take me long."

"Oh yes, your deal with that Enderman?" Dream said. Tubbo flinched. How did Dream know about that? He just got here! "It's dead. Your deal is over."

With a soft thump, a massive green pearl fell to the ground. Tubbo felt his stomach lurch. There was still black blood coating it, glistening in the light.

They just wanted some dirt.

"Do you want to see it?" Dream said, a malicious edge to his voice. Tubbo made a soft noise of denial, shaking his head quickly.

Dream didn't stop him as he walked past, didn't grab him as he reached the top of the dune. The clump of dirt fell to the ground.

Tubbo gagged, turning away. But it was too late. He'd never forget the sight.

He hadn't known them for long, but they didn't deserve this. Tubbo covered his mouth, glad he hadn't eaten anything lately. He probably would have vomited it up.

"Why did you do that?" Tubbo asked, horrified. "There was no reason to kill them!"

Even if it was the last item he needed, Dream could have forced them to leave or kept him away! Not kill them! They hadn't done anything to deserve it other than strike a deal to help him out!

"Because." Dream said. He stepped closer, past the pearl that was discarded like so much trash. "You seem to think that you can still win. And I wanted to show you that winning is impossible."

"It's not impossible." Tubbo insisted. He refused to accept his defeat.

"It is." Dream said steadily. "It doesn't matter if you find another Enderman. I'll kill every single one of them, tear their pearls out, and keep them out of your reach."

And the worst part of it was that Tubbo could tell that the Fae was telling the truth. That he'd spend every last moment of Tubbo's limited time dangling his victory over his head.

"That's stupid." Tubbo snapped, refusing to give into the burning feeling in his eyes. It didn't matter how serious Dream was because he would be twice as determined. "And doesn't even answer the question of why you're doing this."

Dream tilted his head to the side, watching him. "Don't you hate him?" He said, switching topics.

"Philza? Because definitely yes." Tubbo said, confused. Who was him? There was a lot of people that could be. Though Philza had earned a special place on his vengeance list.

"Tommy."

Tubbo froze. "Why would I hate him?" He said. He loved him! They had been best friends since the day they had first met! All of this, the pain, the paranoia, was all to get Tommy back. It was all for him.

"Dealing with Tommy must be very annoying." Dream said, shaking his head. "I keep up on all the current Changelings. He's loud. And impulsive."

"I can be impulsive." Tubbo said, face a bit warm. He could be as impulsive as he wanted.

"Not like him." Dream said. "I'm betting he never listens to you, does he? If he did, you wouldn't be in this mess right now. It's all because of him."

Tubbo stayed silent.

“Maybe this is what he wanted.” Dream said, shrugging. “Maybe he went on that path because he wanted to be found. Because he wanted to get away from you.”

“Tommy would never do that.” Tubbo said quietly. Tommy loved him with all of his heart, in that same stubborn devotion he had kept since they were kids. He clung to that fact. Tommy would never want to leave him. Not before saying he would to his face.

But it was hard to reason when faced with Dream’s unwavering gaze. Tubbo gritted his teeth. He couldn’t acknowledge what Dream was saying. He knew the truth and nothing else mattered.

“I bet he has ignored your advice before too and you’ve always tackled the consequences for him. Even when it means you’re punished too.” Dream kept on talking. “After all, isn’t that what your quest is? One big punishment for you while Tommy gets to become a prince?”

“That’s not exactly a reward.” Tubbo said. If it was anything like Schlatt described, Tommy would lose most of his memories and he knew his friend would hate that.

“I bet that annoys you.” Dream continues as if he had never spoken, his voice cruel and cold.

“Oh, fuck off.” Tubbo snapped. He raised his head, glaring at Dream. “Don’t project what you think I should feel on me. Tommy would do the exact same thing for me and I know it.”

“See, you keep insisting he would.” Dream said. “And yet, I haven’t seen any evidence of it.”

“Because I don’t need to defend my friend to you. I already know him and that’s what matters.” Tubbo said. What was Dream trying to get at? Why insult Tommy?

“So, you’re fine with getting dragged into whatever messes he makes?” Dream said. “Really? I thought you had more self respect than taking care of the consequences of other people’s actions.”

Tubbo folded his arms, one hand settling over the Blaze rod hidden under his sweater. “Consequences? You think I can’t cause trouble? Are we back on your ‘oh look at the tiny guy let’s ignore that he just tricked me into a massive group of Blazes and say he can’t cause trouble’ act?”

Dream suddenly wheezed, his shoulder shaking with the force of his chuckles. Tubbo blinked, a bit surprised by the Fae’s mercurial mood. “Yeah, that was pretty good.” He said, straightening up. “I actually didn’t expect that. I might steal that for later, it was a pretty clever trick.”

“Whatever.” Tubbo said, ignoring the warm feeling he got from being praised. “I just want to know what you’re trying to do right now.”

He had expected Dream to lunge at him by now. The distance between them was so short that Tubbo would have a hard time dodging away if the Fae decided to capture him.

But to his surprise, Dream had been surprisingly chatty. Which was good for his planning, but it meant the other had to be planning something too.

“Isn’t it obvious?” Dream said, the shadows casting his mask into darkness. “I’m going to kill you.”

Chapter End Notes

It should tell you a lot that the scene that caused the most guilt to me was killing off that Enderman.

I was so tempted to have Tubbo refuse the Blaze rod but it just wasn’t working when I wrote it. Maybe I’ll post the excerpt from my attempts later.

One Last Light

Chapter Notes

Also, would you guys be interested in a q&a chapter for this story? If so, comment with your questions and I'll see about answering some before we start the next arc.

(Warning: Mild non-consensual body modification in this chapter)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The words stole the air for his lungs, making Tubbo wheeze and grip over his words. "No." He said. "The deal- The forfeit--"

All of it implied that he would be living if he lost.

But it only implied, Tubbo thought with muted horror, staring at that emotionless mask. Never did it confirm him as safe.

Manhunt. Separate out the words and everything came together in the most horrifying way.

The Hunters' excitement in his memories took on a new edge of cruelty. Would Bad have slit his throat in the briar patch if he didn't push him? Would Sapnap have burned him to ashes or Ant cut him down with his sword if he hadn't distracted them?

"There's that fear I wanted to see." Dream purred. Tubbo flinched, taking a step back as the other stepped forward.

There were no convenient cliffs to leap off of or briar patches to hide in now.

"I didn't even change the rules." Dream continued, his voice sickeningly cheerful. "My friends kill me too. What's fatal for a mortal is not truly fatal for a Fae."

"Why even have a forfeit at all then?" Tubbo said. Why not just say he would die if he lost?

Dream shrugged. "You might live. Summer Fey are not like the Autumn or the Winter Fey. Power must be claimed, a choice made. Like what I said before, what kills a mortal is merely a brief nap for a Summer Fey. And then the forfeit would come into play."

"Never." Tubbo swore.

"You'd love it, after a while." Dream said, tilting his head to the side. "Summer Fey love games. I have no doubt you'd be annoying prey out of some misguided desire to confound me but eventually, you would give in."

“Not happening.” Tubbo said. He wouldn’t say that he would die first because he didn’t want to die either. But choose to become Fae and then forfeit? He wouldn’t.

Dream laughed. Not the cheery wheeze of before, but a cold chuckle. “I don’t care either way.” He said. Tubbo took a step back as the other began to move closer. “Either way, you will die here. Whether you become something better means nothing to me.”

Tubbo pressed a hand against the Blaze rod, trying to remind himself, shock his mind back into functioning.

Whether Dream wanted to kill him or not was irrelevant. He had been under threat from the moment he had stepped into the Veil. Dream was no different, no matter how many dramatic announcements he made.

Tubbo threw himself to the side, narrowly dodging a lazy lunge. He fell to the sand in a cloud of dust, throwing himself into a clumsy roll that took him out of the way of a fireball. He forced himself up to his feet.

Dream laughed for every time he stumbled just out of reach, a breathily exhilarated sound. Every narrow miss just made him more infuriatingly cheery.

And the near misses weren’t going to be enough, he thought. Dream was toying with him, always just slow enough that he could dodge away.

And he was herding him away from the Ender Pearl, closer to the dark towers in the distance. Away from any chance at victory. Every time Tubbo tried to run back to where it was, a slash or fireball would cut him off.

One wrong move, stumble too far, and those wicked claws would slash his throat open or burn him alive.

Focus, he told himself, ducking under a lazy swipe. He needed a weapon of some kind, something to hold Dream off.

What would Tommy do here?

He scrambled to remember what he had on him. The compass couldn’t be used. The letter couldn’t be used either, it was far too dangerous.

But the Blaze rod, still humming with magic...

Instantly, a plan came together. It was crazy, half formed, and practically suicide. But it was better than dodging until Dream got bored.

Tubbo lunged forward, underneath Dream’s claws. This close, Dream towered over him, heat rolling off of him in waves.

“Trying to bore me out of killing you?” Dream taunted. “Or are you just going to give up now?”

“Neither.” Tubbo said. Schlatt’s jacket fell to the ground, drawing Dream’s gaze for a moment. But a moment was all he needed.

He slammed the Blaze rod into Dream’s mask, feeling a burst of glee as the Fae’s head was forced back and they grunted in pain.

Tubbo darted around Dream, racing towards the Ender Pearl that was still lying in the sand. An enraged shriek echoed across the sand and Tubbo threw himself to the side just before a fireball whizzed by his head. He grabbed at the jacket that still laid on the ground, tossing it over his shoulder before glancing up to see a fireball coming towards him.

Instinctively, he swung the Blaze rod, batting away the next fireball. It struck the ground, dissolving into golden embers.

He had deflected it. Could he do it again?

Tubbo let Dream’s gaze, grinning ferally. The Blaze rod hummed in his hands, radiating the same heat that the Blaze nest had. “Feeling bored?” Tubbo taunted.

“Nice trick.” Dream hissed, standing up straight. “But you’re going to need more than tricks to beat me.”

Tubbo yelped, swinging the Blaze rod to block the next fireball. Dream’s axe met the golden rod with a ringing thud that sent shivers up his arm. He let himself roll with the strike, using the momentum to dodge backwards, twisting out of the deadlock. But Dream pressed the advantage, pushing forwards before Tubbo could bring it up again.

The other thing the Blaze had done was the corona trick. But how was he supposed to do that? Tubbo held the Blaze rod tightly, thinking of embers, sparks, fire, preferably fire on the Blaze rod right now-

An odd feeling of heat rushed down his arm at the memory, the end of the Blaze rod bursting into flame.

Dream took a half step back, startled by the light shining directly into his mask. “More clever.” He said, momentary disorientation already gone. Tubbo twirled the stick, attention drawn to how the fire glowed in the twilight around them. “But can you keep up?”

“Can you?” Tubbo said. Dream laughed, throwing himself forward again.

It almost felt like his clumsy spars with Tommy, using heavy sticks from the woods and then later, dull swords bought from a cheap vendor. He felt himself slipping back into the movements, dodging and blocking, flaring the flame to try and blind Dream again.

The second try didn’t work and Tubbo felt his sweater sleeve tear when he didn’t quite dodge the axe blade in time. Of course, he grumbled to himself. It wasn’t like Dream had to fear the fire.

He broke off from his attack, he and Dream circling. “Why do you want to kill me?” Tubbo asked, panting slightly. The Blaze rod sent waves of warmth up his arm, the foreign feeling of

using magic for the first time. It was distracting.

Dream shrugged, the axe in his hand swaying slightly. “Why not?” He asked.

Part of Tubbo wanted to press on. To ask him really, why? Why was his death necessary? But part of him knew he wouldn’t get an answer he’d ever be satisfied with. Dream and him came from two different worlds, and he could never really hope to understand Dream’s.

“Is there any way-“ Tubbo said.

“No.” Dream said. And oddly, Tubbo almost felt relieved. Maybe it was from not having to negotiate whatever heavy price his life carried. “I’ll strike you down, here and now.”

“I’d like to see you try.” Tubbo said. The Blaze rod in his hand flickered.

Dream chuckled, golden flame flickering over his own axe. “You’re running out of time.” He teased. “There’s only so much magic in there for you to steal.”

Tubbo stiffened, eyes darting to his improvised weapon. The closer he looked, the more he could see it. The fire was flickering more and more, the bright glow dulling into a muted shimmer.

He cursed. He needed the Blaze rod to craft the Eye. But he also needed it so he wouldn’t die here.

”Eyes on me.”

Tubbo brought it up just in time to block Dream’s next strike, backing away and ducking under a second. Thoughts of the Ender Pearl drifted away as he began to slip back into the familiar pattern.

He laughed, dancing around Dream’s next strike. Fireflies lit up the air around him, making the shadows look like they were dancing as well.

Guard, block, dodge-

Crack. A pop. And the Blaze rod exploded into a shimmer of dust. Tubbo yelped, flailing as dozens of red hot sparks landed on his hands. Tiny burns covered his palms like little freckles.

He stared at his hands in horror. Why did he keep pushing it? He should have made a break for the Pearl! What was he going to do without a Blaze rod?

There was the crunching of boots through sand. “Can’t say I didn’t warn you.” Dream mocked. “Usually you’re not so distracted.”

Tubbo raised his head, glaring at him. “Are you so much a coward that you’d kill an unarmed person?” He spat.

“Luckily for you, I’m not.” Dream said. He tilted his head to the side. “Get the Pearl.”

“What?”

“It has magic too.” Dream said, twirling the axe in his hand. “I’m sure you can figure it out. It would be far more interesting than me cutting you down right here.”

“And what if I don’t?” Tubbo challenged. Dream tilted his head to the side.

“Then you’ll die.” Dream said. “And I will be very bored.”

“Oh the horror.” Tubbo snapped. But he turned anyways. He swallowed hard, feeling like he was marching to his death as he walked back towards where the Pearl was. The Ender Pearl glimmered softly as the fireflies drifted around it. It felt cool to the touch but Tubbo had to swallow back a retch.

The blood on it was still sticky.

“There you go.” Dream said, sounding pleased. “I’m sure you can figure out how to use that.”

Tubbo nodded, not looking up from the Pearl. The longer he held at it, the more he could feel it. A chilly core that clashed oddly with the warmth in his chest.

He just had to reach out and grab it.

Tubbo thought of endless twilight, the flickering static, the golden sand, the cold blood on his hands-

“Are you a friend of the Enderians?”

Tubbo surfaced with a gasp, shaking as he stared at the Pearl.

It was like being pulled underwater, not even thinking about the need to breathe as it closed over his head. About how odd it was to jump in in the first place.

About how odd it was that he felt like he was burning from the inside out.

Tubbo glanced down at himself. Underneath his sweater, there was a dim, almost unnoticeable glow. A strange warmth was cooled in his chest.

His hands stung like he had dunked them in overly hot water. And yet, he knew he should be in excruciating agony. He had felt the heat of those sparks back at the nest and had no doubt they could burn straight to his bones.

“Are you done yet?” Dream interrupted his thoughts. The Fae was too close to him. Part of Tubbo wanted to reach out, push him, take off into the desert with the teleporting magic he knew dwelled within the Pearl.

The more human part of him told him that he should be afraid again.

There was an odd sense of elation when he looked at Dream. Something playful. Something that demanded he listen and take the magic from the Pearl, retake his place in the little game of back and forth they had.

Summer Fey love games.

“You tricked me.” Tubbo said, the words hollow. “You knew I’d take the magic from the Blaze rod.”

“You figured it out.” Dream said. It was a hollow congratulations. “I was fairly certain that was what you’d do.”

Fairly certain. And yet, the more Tubbo thought about it, the odder Dream’s and his actions were. He should have been killed the moment the fight started. And yet, Dream had pulled his punches until Tubbo reached for magic. Had let Tubbo’s own curiosity and determination lure him into a trap of his own making.

He had completely forgotten about the Ender Pearl and the Blaze rod cracking. His only goal was to fight.

And he knew why. The same creeping dread from Schlatt’s words had curled around his heart.

“Because when I took the magic, it’d make me more Fey.” Tubbo said, looking down at the Pearl. Even now, it felt like a yawning chasm in his chest. No. Like he was tinder waiting for a spark. “Drawing from the Pearl to win or escape would have been the last push.”

Dream sighed. “It would have been more gentle that way.” He said.

“Gentle?” Tubbo snapped. He gasped a bit as the heat flared with his anger before subsiding. “You’re warping me. Have warped me. And you said you’d kill me. How is that gentle?”

“If you survived changing, it would be.” Dream said. It was horrifying how calm he was as he explained. “You’d die laughing at what a fun game we’re playing and in a week, be racing around the forest again.”

And the worst part was that he could almost see it. How the strange elation that was building in his chest during their fight would consume his fear, turning their deadly game into something fun. The fear of death would fade away, leaving only the joy of the game.

“No.” Tubbo whispered. He couldn’t let that happen. The childish glee would wrap him up in a warm bubble of joy but he’d forget all about rescuing Tommy.

“What makes you think you have a choice?” Dream said. “You’re dying either way. It’s either you become a Fae and return, or you die as a human.”

“You’re a monster.” Tubbo said, but he couldn’t deny his hands were trembling. It was so tempting to reach into the Ender Pearl and pull.

The best trap is the one you make for yourself.

“You’re a masochist.” Dream said. Tubbo spluttered. “Okay, that came out wrong. But really, I don’t see what you’re whining about. You were enjoying yourself.”

Tubbo took a step back as Dream began to move forward again. He could tell by the tilt of the mask that Dream was enjoying himself. Enjoying how he could drag out this moment and watch him panic.

If he didn’t use the magic of the Ender Pearl, there was no way he could take Dream in a fight. He’d die.

But did he need to draw upon the magic himself?

“Do you do this for a lot of people?” Tubbo asked, looking away from Dream. The only landmarks he could see were the massive pillars of obsidian.

He’d heard that a dragon guarded these lands, nesting above an altar, a hole between the Veil and the mortal world.

Luckily for him, it looked like the dragon was gone right now. And he was pretty sure he knew who had killed it this time.

Think. What else could the Ender Pearl do?

“Yes and no.” Dream said. Tubbo scowled at him. “Anyone could theoretically start the process with a magical kickstart. All it needs is a bit of guidance afterwards. But do I wait this long? No. Consider yourself lucky.”

His tone softened and for a moment, the shadows slipped away and he was the Dream from the beginning, the laughing greeter. “I want you to make the right choice.”

Tubbo bit his lip, looking down. Reluctantly, he had to admit he kinda was lucky.

Because Dream delaying for so long had given him an idea.

“Why me?” Tubbo asked, circling around Dream. “This is the second time a Fey Royal has shown interest in me. Shouldn’t you hate me? I nearly burned Sapnap’s letter.”

Dream turned, watching him with the same bemusement as one would watch a bumbling pet. Tubbo bristled. “Sapnap is all spark and no flame. He’ll calm down soon enough.”

“That didn’t answer my first question.” Tubbo said. “You’re avoiding it.”

“Am I?”

“You’re infuriating.” Tubbo snapped. He stopped, taking a deep breath to quell the rising heat in his chest. He really hoped whatever he drew into himself would burn itself out soon.

It was manageable but uncomfortable.

“You're fun.” Dream said. Tubbo went red. “You’ve gotten the furthest of any human I’ve played this game with. You’re clever enough to be interesting but not enough that I can’t control you.”

He laughed at how Tubbo bristled. “Did you really think every choice was your own? That the bramble patch was conveniently there for you to escape in or that your path would take you here, facing me?”

Tubbo swallowed, trying to bury the nervous feeling in his chest. “You don’t control me.” He said, but he could hear a bit of a shake in his voice.

Some parts of his escapes were a bit convenient.

But that didn’t matter, he reminded himself. As Tommy would say, all that mattered was that you got away.

“Do you really believe that?” Dream mocked. The axe’s blade glinted in the dim light as he raised it up. “Even now, I know what you’ll do. You’re too human to die for your beliefs.”

“You’re right.” Tubbo said. He smiled, looking up at Dream. “I won’t die for them.”

And then, he turned and threw the Ender Pearl.

He nearly vomited as magic wrapped around him, the world shifting at dizzying speed. It was instinct alone that had him hit the ground running, pushing himself forward.

“Where are you going Tubbo?” He heard Dream yell. There was an edge of madness to his voice that wasn’t there before, echoing across the sand. “You have nowhere to run!”

“Yes, I do!” Tubbo yelled back. He skidded down the slope of a sand dune, the last obstacle.

Tubbo gasped. In front of him was a great skeleton, bones as black as night. It almost looked like it was asleep, skeletal wings draped over its sides and skull resting on its front paws.

It felt sacred. It felt like he wasn’t supposed to be seeing this.

Of course, he went closer.

The skeleton was curled around a stone altar as if guarding it. An empty pool, waiting to be filled. The rift wasn’t open.

“Trying to run away?” Tubbo barely managed not to flinch at the sudden voice from behind him. “How terrible Tubbo. And you’ve lost your Pearl too.”

“I’m not running away.” Tubbo said. He circled around the altar, carefully avoiding the skeleton. Dream was always one step behind him, uncomfortably close.

“The altar doesn’t open unless the dragon is killed.” Dream said, swinging his axe idly. He could feel the whoosh of air at his back. “Trust me, I know.”

“I’ll trust you.” Tubbo said. He shifted his gaze down to the ground. “But I’m not here for the dragon or the altar.”

“Oh?”

“You don’t care much about these Eyes of Ender.” Tubbo said. “But I’m betting you make multiple of them every time you play. What do you do with them at the end?”

The next axe swing came uncomfortably close. “You think they’re here?” Dream said.

Tubbo paused. “I think I do know where one is at.” He said. He lunged forward, knowing Dream could follow.

And then he threw himself back, right into Dream. There was the flash of the axe whirling just above his head and Tubbo let out a grunt as he hit the ground with a thud, Back against Dream’s chest.

A hand snagged his curls and Tubbo yelped as his head was pulled back. “Caught.” Dream said.

“Already won.” Tubbo said. He opened his hand, revealing Dream’s bracelet. Pickpocketing. He had never regretted learning the skill. It had been endless fun at the cabin to steal objects back and forth.

For a long tense moment, Dream was quiet.

And then he started to wheeze. “You dragged me all the way over here.” He said, gasping with laughter. “To steal my bracelet?”

“That was really just to annoy you.” Tubbo shamelessly admitted, sitting up. And he had always been curious about the dragon and the altar.

He yelped as warm arms pulled him back down. “Are you really sure you want to go?” Dream said, propping his chin on Tubbo’s shoulder. “You’d fit in so well.”

“I already know where I fit.” Tubbo said softly, looking up at the starless sky. The chasm in his chest felt so much better when he was in Dream’s arms, making him feel sleepy.

“If you say so.” Dream said, a hint of doubt in his voice. Unexpectedly, his grip loosened enough that Tubbo could slip out and stand up, looking down at Dream.

For a moment, he wondered what it would be like to draw the magic from the bracelet and lay back down. To live a life of endless games and tricks.

Instead, he dropped the bracelet, watching as Dream snatched it out of the air. “No offense.” Tubbo said. “But I don’t want to see you again.”

And as he walked into the shadowed desert, he could hear Dream’s quiet chuckles.

”You can’t escape the games of Summer forever. I’ll see you soon.”

Chapter End Notes

Dream's and Schlatt's versions of adoption are very different.

Also, I can't believe you guys think I would kill Tubbo! I would *never*.

:)

Also, would you guys be interested in a q&a chapter for this story? If so, send in questions and I'll see about answering some before we start the next arc.

Last Embers

Chapter Notes

I think this is one of my longest fics. Wow.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tubbo makes it halfway down the side of the next sand dune before he finally falls.

He slides partially down before coming to a stop, staring up at the sky. Logically, he knows this is a bad idea. It's not particularly comfortable for one. And probably not very good for any of the possible scratches he might have.

But he just can't bring himself to care.

Was the Enderman's body still there? Or had it already been covered by the sand? Part of him wanted to believe that Dream had been lying. That the body he saw wasn't the Enderman he had dealt with.

But he knew Dream wasn't lying. The madness in the Fae's voice, the way he'd spoken about tearing away Tubbo's victory... He had killed the Enderman just for the crime of speaking to him.

And it hurts.

But it also doesn't.

It felt almost like he wanted it to hurt. Like he was prodding at where a tooth had fallen out in his gum and expecting a starburst of pain.

Tubbo closed his eyes. He couldn't lay here for long. Dream could cross this distance in seconds.

But he didn't want to get up.

And it was stupid and frustrating and maddening, making him boil and boil on the inside. How could he keep lying here? How could he keep pretending like this was safe?

But he didn't want to get up. Getting up meant pushing down all the tiredness and pain and going to deal with more cruel Fey. Getting up meant having to pretend like there wasn't an aching hole in his chest.

Because that was the sore spot, wasn't it? That even with the threats, and the pain, and the murder he had witnessed, he wanted to go back to Dream.

Back to where life was easy. A game with rules and an ending, and a nice rest afterwards.

He wrapped his arms around himself. It hadn't been easier with Schlatt, proven by how he had kept the Fae's jacket all this time. It felt like the longing was stacking up on itself, long shut mental cupboards finally swinging open.

Because that's what it was, wasn't it? Longing. He'd always wanted parents. He thought he had outgrown it after the orphanage. But it hadn't really left, it had stayed and festered in the dark crevices of his mind.

Was this what Tommy would want?

Not Dream of course. But he knew Tommy. Remembered the jealous looks at the lucky kids, the vulnerability when he talked about family. Would Tommy want to be the prince of the Winter Court?

Was he the bad guy?

...No, Tubbo thought, opening his eyes again. Because it wasn't about freeing Tommy. It was about asking him.

Because a long time ago, they had sworn to be brothers. Wherever Tommy went, Tubbo would be by his side. And vice versa.

But it's different now.

Tubbo felt his lips twist into a bitter smile. Was it?

Family. And for a moment, it felt like his chest was burning, the flame stoked high. Tubbo took a deep breath, forcing himself to sit up.

"We built a family." He mumbled to himself. A family of two, with laughter and love and a little cabin in the woods. Ruthlessly, Tubbo gathered up the longing and shoved it back in the dusty corners of his mind.

It wasn't a very logical solution. But he wasn't feeling very logical right now.

He staggered to his feet, wincing at the ache beginning to grow. Tubbo ran his hands slowly over himself, wincing when he hit bruises and scrapes.

Luckily, it felt like most of the blood had been absorbed by his sweater. He grimaced looking at it. He was pretty sure it wasn't fixable even with Tommy's skills.

The other would probably be furious with him. Tubbo snorted. It would be nice to argue with Tommy again.

He set off at a slow pace, hoping he was heading toward the Spring Court. Or at least not back towards the forest.

Would the body still be there? Or would the breeze have buried it already?

Tubbo's steps stuttered to a stop.

He shouldn't. He needed all the time he could get for the next Court and traveling back to the Winter Court. But he still found himself turning back towards where the forest likely was.

Maybe the Enderman had been terrible. Maybe they had murdered hundreds and terrorized villages. Maybe their death at Dream's hands was ultimately a good thing.

But they had been kind to him. And he knew it was probably because he had been useful then. But it was enough that he felt bad leaving their body to get buried by sand.

He looked away from the fountain when he walked past it. There was no sign that Dream was ever there.

But after a short walk, he was pretty sure the body was gone. Tubbo sighed, slumping a bit. None of the dunes looked the same anymore and the breeze was constantly sending mini avalanches of sand towards him.

Tubbo looked up, glaring at it. "Can't you be nice and show me where they are?" He said half heartedly.

The blast of wind is so strong that Tubbo skids a few steps backwards, raising an arm to protect his face against the sand that was whipped around. He blinked, coughing a bit.

"Nevermind then." Tubbo said, turning back. He'd need to move on then.

He froze.

Off to the side, dark blood splattered the ground. He could see the misshapen bulge in the sand, showing where something had been buried.

It was if someone or something had carefully carved away enough to show him what he wanted to see. Tubbo bit back the urge to thank them. He didn't want to go into debt for this.

Just past the crime scene, he could see the dirt he had dropped. A breeze whipped past him, pulling away more of the sand that covered it.

This was definitely the scene. Tubbo swallowed hard, approaching the dirt clod. It was a bit crumbly, sand mixed into the dirt now. But it stuck together.

"I don't know what to say." Tubbo said quietly. He didn't want to look at the dead body. "But you didn't deserve this."

He fought down his nausea, walking over and gently depositing the dirt over the body. Tubbo picked up a handful of sand from the side of the sun, working until the dirt was buried.

"Our deal has been completed." He said. After all, he did get the Enderman's Pearl. "Thank you."

Tubbo lingered for a moment, closing his eyes and feeling the breeze sweeping through the languid heat. "Goodbye." He said. "Rest in peace."

He wanted to do more, he really did. But in the end, there just wasn't enough time. At least the dirt had been delivered. It made him feel a little bit better.

The sand dune looked even more daunting now that he was facing it again. With a sigh, Tubbo started trudging up the side again.

It was quiet without Dream around. He wondered if that was normal or if the Fae had cleared out this area.

Tubbo grimaced. It wouldn't surprise him if Dream had done so but purposefully left the Enderman nearby. That way he could show Tubbo his willingness to murder for the game.

At least it meant he was having a peaceful walk. For now.

It was when he passed the outermost pillar that Tubbo finally spoke. "Are you going to talk or just keep watching me."

Silence.

"It's hard not to notice, big man." Tubbo said, staring steadily in front of him. "You're kind of wearing white in a shadowy area."

"You'd be surprised what most people don't see." Tubbo didn't flinch as the man slid in beside him, perfectly matching his pace. "What really gave away?"

"I saw you behind one of the pillars." Tubbo admitted shamelessly. It had only been for a second, when he had fallen onto Dream, but he had seen him. "But thanks for confirming that you stuck around."

The other chuckled. "Bit mouthy, aren't you?"

"It's working out for me." Tubbo said. He was pretty sure his thought to speech filter was degrading from exhaustion and stress but it should hopefully still prevent him from doing anything too bad. "Who are you anyways?"

"Punz."

Tubbo froze before hitting his stride again. Punz, despite his casual name, was a feared mercenary. He worked closest to the Summer Court, committing all sorts of crime for money. "Why are you watching me? Going to deliver me to Dream?"

"Nah, he didn't pay for that service." Tubbo frowned. "He wanted me to pass something on. Said you forgot it."

With that, Punz stopped, raising his hand. Tubbo couldn't help the quiet gasp when he saw what it was. The Summer Charm, a tiny stylized flame. It was beautiful.

The chasm in his chest aches.

Tubbo made an angry sound as the charm was whisked out of his reach. He wanted it!

Punz had a strange look on his face. “You about to fall over or something?”

“Huh?” Tubbo said. He shook his hand, trying to work his way out of the fog. When he looked at the charm again, his chest aches, but it wasn’t as bad as the first time. His hand clamped over his bracelet, nervously toying with the charms. “I’m fine.”

Lie. He was lucky he hadn’t looked at his wrist. Dealing with these... sudden cravings was going to be difficult.

“I’ll take that.” Tubbo said, reaching his hand out. He was certain he could control himself now.

“And what will you pay me?” Punz asked. Tubbo pulled his hand halfway back, confused.

“Pay you?” He said. That didn’t make any sense at all! Why would he pay Punz? “But I won that Charm? It’s mine.”

“But there is still the delivery fee.” Punz said, shaking his head like Tubbo had tried to scam him and disappointed him. And he would know, having scammed people before and gotten that same look.

“Didn’t Dream ask you to deliver it to me?” Tubbo pointed out. Why should he have to pay a fee for Dream’s actions?

“So?” Punz said. “He said you’d be good for it.”

He was going to kill Dream. Knocking him over and unleashing a flock of Blazes on him had been far too gentle. Tubbo glared at Punz, annoyed.

Judging by what he knew of the Fae, it would be hard to talk his way into getting this for free. Punz loved money. Free probably didn’t exist in his vocabulary.

“What do you want in exchange?” Tubbo said stiffly.

“Diamonds. At least my weight in them.” Punz replied promptly. Tubbo stared at him.

“There’s no way I can get you those!” He said. Unless Pun weighed nothing which was unlikely. “I’ve never even seen a diamond!”

“Figure it out then. You’re supposed to be clever.” Punz said with a shrug. “This charm is worth a lot. I’d get far more money by keeping it. You’re getting the friends and family discount.”

“Can I get some time to think about it?” Tubbo asked, staring at Punz’s throat. Punz smirked at him.

“Sure.”

Tubbo glanced away from Punz and his stupid, smug face. There was no way he could get that many diamonds, not without bargaining a lot for them.

And he wouldn't be surprised if Dream made that deal just about impossible too. Likely, he'd be forced into yet another game, now with his most successful tricks removed from play.

Stealing? No. The Charm was in Punz's hand. He was talented but not that talented.

Overpowering him was all kinds of bad. Punz was a trained fighter and Tubbo was exhausted and scraped up. Maybe he had a tiny chance, back when he was well rested and healed, but that was in Purpled's and Ranboo's cottage.

Now, he didn't have any people to carry him around or give him magical potions.

“I miss Purpled and Ranboo.” Tubbo mumbled, staring at the sand. It would be really nice to have them around, even just to talk to them.

“Purpled?”

Tubbo froze. “You talking to me, big man?” He said, casually. Inside, he was cursing himself. He could have sworn he had said that quietly-

Wait, he forgot about how most Fae had fantastic hearing. Tubbo wanted to slap himself.

“Cut the crap.” Punz said. “You know Purpled?”

“What about him?” Tubbo asked warily. As much as he wanted the Charm, he wasn't going to sell out those two.”

Punz ran a hand through his hair. “He's my younger brother.” He said.

Tubbo stared at him. At the immortal Fae mercenary standing in front of him. “Really?” Tubbo said doubtfully. Did Punz also leave behind a mortal life?

“Yes.” Punz said. “It's the Fae thing, isn't it? Throws people off.”

“A little.” Tubbo said, rocking back and forth on his heels. He could see little signs, maybe, of relation. The shape of their faces, their blonde hair.

But Punz had a sort of inhuman perfection to his appearance. His hair was a bit too golden, teeth a bit too sharp. His eyes were a dark blue instead of Purpled's violet.

He couldn't rule out the possibility that Punz was lying. Purpled was a Witch and Ranboo clearly had something going on.

“I don't know anything about them.” Tubbo said evasively. He couldn't claim he didn't know them, he'd given too much away already. “We met a long time ago.”

Punz rolled his eyes. “Yeah, like last week. Purpled and Ranboo have been in that cabin for a long time and there’s no way you were taking casual trips through the Veil.”

Tubbo shrugged. A long time to a Fae could mean well over a century or a couple of weeks. Time was funny like that in the Veil. “No clue who you’re talking about, boss man.”

Punz stared at Tubbo. “How did you get past Dream again?” He asked, looking morbidly curious.

“I’ll tell you the story if you give me the Charm.” Tubbo bargained. Punz chuckled, shaking his head.

“No deal.” He said. “I watched the entire thing after all. Just don’t understand how it happened if you’re like this.”

“Like what?”

Punz rolled his eyes. Now he was really getting to him. “I don’t understand it at all.” He said again. There was a moment of quiet, Tubbo watched as a breeze pushed more sand down the dune.

“So, you watched the entire thing?” He asked softly. Knowing Punz had seen it, he was almost embarrassed and angry at that. That moment should have been private, only between him and Dream.

“Up until you two fell.” Punz said. “Then I looked away. Figured you’d two would want a bit of privacy to talk.”

Tubbo’s smile was bittersweet. “Yeah. Talk.” There was an awkwardness to the silence now and Tubbo sighed. “You’re not going to question it?”

“Question what?” Punz said, idly fiddling with the Charm. Tubbo glared at him. “The fact you haven’t paid me yet?”

Tubbo rolled his eyes. “Why I didn’t take his offer.” He said. “Seems like a popular topic of conversation lately.”

He had been half expecting Punz to push him back to Dream as quickly as possible. But instead, the Fae seemed happy to stand and talk to him.

It was weird and made him wary.

Punz sighed, his eyes strangely distant. “If you don’t want to take it, you don’t have to.” Tubbo twitched, startled. “The Fey can be obsessive creatures. Once they fixate on something, they’ll chase it to the ends of the world.”

“You talk like you’re not one of them.” Tubbo pointed out. He nearly jumped when Punz laughed, more bitter than humorous.

“Like I implied earlier, wasn’t always a Fae. Let’s just say, I have personal experience.” Punz said bitterly. “You’re definitely more well liked than I was. Could be a good thing or a very bad thing.”

So if he had lost, he would be like Punz? Or different, Tubbo supposed. Most Fey he had seen seemed fairly unique.

But that begged the question, how did he become a Fae then? Was it related to Purpled being a Witch?

“How did you-“

“Ten years of life.” Punz said seriously. Tubbo choked a bit. Ten years? That was a bit much for a story even if he ached to know it.

“That much?” He asked, morbidly curious. Punz folded his arms, staring him down.

“If you’re going to pry into my personal business then it’s going to cost you.” Punz said. “Take it or leave it.”

“Leave it.” Tubbo said. It wasn’t worth the price. Maybe he could see about finding the story later. Surely Purpled will know something?

“That’s what I thought.” Punz said. He had one hand on his sword now. “Back to my original question, you know Purpled?”

Tubbo fidgeted a bit. “Not well.” He said reluctantly. “I got a bit injured. Ranboo picked me up and they patched me up.”

He missed the cottage. Back then, his quest had been straightforward. Defeat the Fey royals and take the Charms back to the Winter Court. And now, there were feelings involved.

It was terrible.

“That definitely sounds like Ranboo.” Punz said. “At least, what I know about him.”

“Purpled charged me.” Tubbo said. He smiled a bit, remembering the trade. From news to diamonds. And yet, he could see the similarity between them now.

Punz’ gaze softened. “That definitely sounds like him.” He said. “Always wanting to be paid for his work.”

“You’re literally charging me for the delivery of a Charm that I own.” Tubbo pointed out. Punz rolled his eyes.

“I didn’t say I wasn’t proud of him, did I?” He said. “Good on him for knowing how to strike a good deal now.”

Tubbo watched Punz, pensive. On one hand, the Fae could be lying for information. But on the other, his feelings really did look genuine.

“Why don’t you go visit him then?” Tubbo said, shifting gear so he could get more information. After all, if Punz was Purpled’s brother, shouldn’t he have access to the cottage?

“Not that easy.” Punz said. The glare was back again. “No Fey can enter the boundaries of his yard or enter the house. I can’t even find the damn place.”

That was informative, Tubbo thought, narrowing his eyes. It was a good answer for why Ranboo and Purpled could live in the Veil in relative safety without being a servant or a pet, the more common occupations for mortals in the Veil. “Do you have any proof of that?” Tubbo asked.

“Fuck off, I can’t visit my little brother, that’s your damn proof.” Punz snapped. “I’m not here to entertain your interest in mysteries and I’m sure as hell not getting paid for that.”

“Fine, fine.” Tubbo said, backing down quickly. “I don’t want to risk their safety and I don’t know if I can trust you.”

Tubbo almost regretted saying it because Punz flinched, actually flinched, like he had been stabbed. “Makes sense.” Punz said, looking away. “I probably wouldn’t either.”

There was a big story behind this and Tubbo ached to know what it was. Only the steep price kept him from asking Punz again.

“Do you only work for Dream?” Tubbo asked, looking back at Punz. In the stories, Punz worked everywhere.

In the stories, he had been around for centuries.

“I work for whoever pays me.” Punz said. That explains why Dream picked him. A convenient loophole to say he wasn’t sabotaging Tubbo’s claiming of the Charm at all.

Tubbo scoffed, looking back up the hill. “You definitely remind me of Purpled.” He said. He paused.

Maybe it was a risk. Maybe by doing this, he was cursing Purpled.

But the way Punz looked, the way his hand began to move away from his sword as they talked, it all looked genuine. Like real love.

“He’s doing okay.” Tubbo said. “I don’t think he’s happy about being stuck in the cottage. But Ranboo brings him news and they seem pretty content with how things are going.”

And when he starts talking, it’s like he can’t talk. The words spill out of him, talking about Purpled had fidgeted, the coziness of their house, even how Purpled’s magic study was going.

And Punz just watched him with that same soft look in his eyes.

Tubbo finally came to a stop, panting slightly. “That might have been a bit much.” He said, rubbing the back of his head.

Something warm pressed into his hand. “It was just enough.” Punz said. Tubbo’s eyes widened in surprise as he looked down.

The Charm.

“Are you sure?” He asked. He cursed himself as soon as he said it. Did he really want Punz to snatch it back?

“Take it as payment.” Punz said. “My brother and I both like to be paid in news.”

“Huh.” Tubbo said. He hadn’t expected that to work at all. In all honesty, he had only started babbling because, well, he kind of empathized with Punz. A bit.

He knew what it was like to miss someone who was out of your reach.

He clipped the Charm onto his bracelet, watching it chime in the breeze. “Thank you.” Tubbo said, looking back up at Punz. It was a bit risky but he felt like he had to say something.

“No problem, kid.” Punz said, turning away. “Good luck on the next Court. You’re going to need it.”

“People keep telling me that, big man.” Tubbo said. He grinned. “And yet, I still do just fine.”

Punz chuckled, shaking his head. With a flick of his hand, a Pearl appeared. Tubbo felt the chasm in his chest yawn open when he looked at it.

He could taste blood in his mouth from where he bit down on his cheek. Every fiber in his body told him to lunge forward and snatch it away. If Punz noticed, he didn’t say anything.

With a flick of his hand, Punz tossed it forward, disappearing in a violet crackle only seconds later. Tubbo let himself sag, breathing hard.

“I’ve got to find a way to deal with that.” Tubbo mumbled, turning away. He couldn’t keep getting distracted every time one of the Fae used magic.”

The breeze whistled around him, making his bracelet chime. “Speaking of Fae.” Tubbo said, turning around. No one was there.

And yet, he could still feel their presence. “Come out.” Tubbo said. “The End is a desert. I’m pretty sure nice cool breezes aren’t that common, especially ones that smell like pumpkin and maple syrup.”

“And what of it?” Tubbo jumped, looking around. There was a soft chuckle, practically right by his ear. “Jumpy, kid?”

“Of course you can make the breeze talk. Because why not.” Tubbo ignored the next chuckle, taking a deep breath to center himself. “Hello, Schlatt.”

“I didn’t think you’d call me out like this.” The Fae said. “I was pretty sure that you wouldn’t want to see or speak to me for a while after our little adventure.”

“Apparently you didn’t care much for not seeing me.” Tubbo said. He had wondered if it was some sort of side effect from the Autumn charm. “What do you want from me?”

“Oh.” A chuckle. “Just a little chat.”

Chapter End Notes

Don’t forget to check out Changing of the Seasons for a bonus ending!

Also, funnily enough, this actually answered part of a question I received earlier.

Will there be any more Schlatt and Tubbo in the future? If not in the main fic then in this one shot book? I would love to see more of what would happened if Tubbo lost!

So here’s a few more questions and answers:

Out of each of the fey courts, what has been your favorite one to write? (At least so far?)

Autumn Court! I had a lot of fun setting up the environment and the people within. It’s also where Tubbo learned a lot about what his quest would be like.

What are you tricks for getting around writer’s block?

First, write what you want to write! Yeah, you could get a lot of kudos if you write another riff of a super popular AU in a huge fandom, but if you want to write epic poetry about a crackship, it’ll be harder to get motivation. Second, don’t compare yourself to other fics. Everyone has a different style of writing and none is intrinsically better. Learn, but don’t psyche yourself out. Third, push yourself. Waiting for those great moments when you feel inspired and want to write means you’re likely gonna wait for a while. Give yourself a writing goal everyday and try to stick to it. Make a schedule for when chapters come out. Remember, you can only read and edit what’s actually on the page. Fourth, if you’re having trouble with a scene, take a break! Go for a walk! Make some food and drink some water! Let your mind wander and mull it over. Often, you’ll come up with better ideas by letting yourself daydream then staring at a screen. Hope that helps!

Wailing Winds

Chapter Notes

Mild trigger warning for emotional breakdowns.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“A little chat.” Tubbo said neutrally. Did Schlatt expect him to believe that? “Using magic in an unallied Court’s land all for a little chat?”

Amongst the most basic information people learned was the alliances between Courts. They were even taught that in the orphanages despite being one step up from convenient sacrifices.

It was a chirpy happy little tale told in soft words for children. One step up from nursery rhyme, it talked about a kid meeting the ‘bringers’ of seasons and talking about their role.

It had been one of Tubbo’s favorites until he realized that in the adult version, the mortal main character died at the end. Horribly.

“Autumn is allied with Winter.” He said. “And Summer with Spring. And never shall they meet.”

“‘Never shall they meet?’ Schlatt said, scoffing a bit. “And here people call me pretentious. Do people actually say that?”

Tubbo flushed a bit, hoping Schlatt couldn’t see. Judging by the soft laughter, he was pretty sure that hope was in vain. “It’s supposed to be sort of a hyperbole.” He said. “No one really sees Courts working together outside of their alliances.”

”For good reason.”

“What does that mean?” Tubbo asked, morbidly curious. He had never really found a good reason why Fey Courts had such solid alliances.

“That’s because no one survives it.” Tubbo blanched. “Consider it a more friendly version of war. Take our frustrations out on others instead of a massive uprising.”

“You’re talking about slaughtering villages.” Tubbo said, choking on the words. He had seen the aftermath of what happened when villages earned the ire, interest, or were simply unlucky enough to become targets.

Razed wasn’t even close enough to describe it. And Schlatt talked about it like it was a mild little argument and blowing off some steam afterward.

“The alliances are there for a reason though.” Schlatt continued as if he hadn’t spoken. “It keeps the balance of power. With two on each side, it never really heats up into war.”

“But now you’re interfering with Dream’s territory.” Tubbo pointed out, wrapping his arms around himself.

“Do you not want me to talk to you?” Schlatt said lightly. Tubbo shivered. “I’m starting to feel a bit insulted.”

“I don’t feel much either way.” Tubbo said, phrasing it carefully. “I’m just concerned about you infringing on Dream’s territory to have this chat with me. I’m the one who is still here after all.”

“Aw, lighten up kid. You’re safe.”

“I beg to differ.” Tubbo said, kicking at a bit of sand. He started walking, knowing the breeze would follow him. He still had to get to the Spring Court before time was up.

“Why? No one will hurt you.” Schlatt said. “You’re one of mine.”

Tubbo felt a shiver go up his spine. “Dream was going to kill me.” That he knew for a fact. If it hadn’t been for Dream’s ‘interest’, he would have had an axe buried in his chest already.

“You wouldn’t have died.” Schlatt said. “All you had to do is call my name and I would have brought you safely back home.”

“I wouldn’t have done that.” Tubbo said. The lie felt like acid in his throat, burning his tongue slowly. If he was bleeding out on the sand, he had no idea what he would have said as the breeze whistled around him.

“If that’s what you prefer to believe.” Schlatt said indulgently.

“Philza and Technoblade declared a Hunt on me.” Tubbo retorted. He hated how smug Schlatt’s tone was.

“We’re allies, kid.” Schlatt said. “Of course, before they would kill ya. Now they’ll just rough you up a bit and then bring you to me. Consider yourself lucky, you’d be the first to escape a Hunt.”

But would it really be an escape, Tubbo thought, if he went from one King to another? Either way, he’d be out of the picture and the Winter Court could keep Tommy.

“Of course, you don’t have to wait until you’re bleeding out. You can ask me right now and I’ll take you back.”

“No, that’s-“ Tubbo shook his head. “Why would I want to do that?”

He was so close! One more Charm and he could get Tommy back. Why would he want to give up now?

“It’s only going to get more difficult from here.” Schlatt said. “You’ve had your fun. Don’t you think it’s time you come home?”

“This isn’t about fun!” Tubbo snapped. He didn’t come to the Veil for fun! He didn’t leave his home for fun!

“I know that.” Schlatt cooed like Tubbo was an angry child who needed placating. Tubbo flushed red, glaring at nothing. “Aw, don’t glare at me kid. I’m being understanding.”

“You’re making fun of me.” Tubbo snapped. He winced when he realized how much of a child he sounded like.

“I’m not.” Schlatt said in the tone of someone who was definitely lying. “But aren’t you tired and hurt?”

“I’m fine.”

“That’s a lie. Your clothes look like a piskie went after them.” Tubbo slumped a bit. Of course, Schlatt had noticed that. He unfolded the jacket, putting it on while trying to ignore Schlatt’s chuckles. At least it gave him more cover.

“Do you like the jacket? I can get you another one.” Schlatt said. “You look good in them.”

“I’m fine.” Tubbo said stiffly. “I don’t want to trade anything.”

“You don’t have to trade anything.” Schlatt said. His voice seemed to echo around Tubbo, blocking out the soft sounds of the desert. “All you have to do is take a quick trip back to the Autumnal Grove. Just a little trip.”

“There is no such thing as a quick trip in the Veil.” Tubbo said. And even if he got protection from the screwy time rules, that would set him back so far in terms of travel.

Not to mention, he could run into Dream and the others while trying to walk back through.

“You could rest.” Schlatt continued as if he hadn’t heard Tubbo. “There’s a nice comfortable room with your name on it. Don’t you want to sleep?”

“Yes.” Tubbo said truthfully. “It’s what will come when I wake up that I don’t want, boss man.”

It was tempting. Oh so tempting. His feet dragged as he walked and his eyes itched every so often as his body tried to adjust. A warm bed, or even just a comfortable pile of leaves, sounded absolutely heavenly.

But he couldn’t give in. If he fell asleep in the Autumn Court’s grasp, he wouldn’t be waking up. At least, not with the memories that made him Tubbo.

“Why are you so afraid of that, kid? You’d be a prince when you wake up. You’d never have to be scared again.” Schlatt said. And frustratingly enough, he really did sound curious.

“Being afraid isn’t always bad.” Tubbo insisted. He couldn’t count the number of bad situations he and Tommy had escaped because they had a bad feeling. “It keeps you safe.”

“I can keep you safe.” Schlatt said. “You’ll never grow old, never be hurt. You’ll get to live in a world where your favorite season is everyday. Doesn’t that sound nice?”

Don’t be tempted, Tubbo reminded himself sternly. But he could smell fresh gingerbread on the breeze and it made his mouth water. Gingerbread was a rare treat for the two, the product of long months of odd jobs and saving.

He smiled at the memory. They would have long discussions into the night on what to buy. Tommy swore by chocolate chip cookies and Tubbo would kill for gingerbread.

In the end, they always ended up picking whatever they hadn’t chosen last time. And then pretending that it was a hard fought argument and not a carefully alternated schedule.

“No.” Tubbo said, shaking his head. But his rebellious stomach grumbled.

“You’re a pretty shitty liar, kid.” Schlatt said. “Promise I’ll feed ya too.”

Tubbo snorted, rolling his eyes. “Oldest trick in the book, big man.” He said. “Fey food is never for free. You already tried that on me.”

Every crumb would come with strings attached. Unless it was freely given or properly paid for, the food would trap him in the Veil, the Autumnal Grove specifically.

And there was even more risk now, he thought, looking down at his chest. The glow had faded but the ache still remained. Eating magical food would probably make his problem worse.

“Does it hurt?” Schlatt asked. “Honestly, if I had known that would have worked, I would have tried it for my trial.”

Tubbo flushed red. “Fuck off.” He said. He knew it had been a dumb mistake. But it’s not like there were many stories talking about absorbing magic and what happened afterwards.

“Does it hurt?” Schlatt asked again. Tubbo hated how his voice made him feel all warm like Schlatt really did care. Apparently the odd charisma of the Autumn Fey could carry over the breeze. Good to know.

He hated it.

“It doesn’t.” Tubbo said. After all, it was more of a low ache. Tolerable really. It only upgraded to splitting when he forced himself away from the Ender Pearl and Charm.

He had to force his hand away from the bracelet then. It was like he wasn’t himself at all.

“Looks like we have a little liar on our hands.” Schlatt said. “Cute, but let’s save it for others that aren’t me. I practically wrote the playbook before you were even born.”

“Is that why you keep using old tricks over and over like a cheap record?” Tubbo said. As soon as he said it, he knew he had made a mistake.

The breeze turned bitterly cold, lashing against his skin and stealing the air out of Tubbo’s lungs.

“You’re acting like a real brat.” Schlatt said, his voice as icy as the wind. Tubbo couldn’t respond, wheezing for air. “Here I am, being kind and letting you run around like a lunatic.”

“But no, you just had to throw it in my face, didn’t you? Do you think that I’ve lost? That you really triumphed over the King of the Autumn Court?”

Tubbo wheezed out something that vaguely sounded like ‘stop it’. His eyes were watering so bad he could barely see.

“I’m having patience, kid. I really am. I could have had you on your knees within minutes. At any step of your journey, I could flick my hand and drag you back. There’s a reason you mortals say people are stolen away by the Fey. I don’t need your permission.”

“Please.” Tubbo wheezed. He felt like the breeze was going to tear open his skin.

All at once, the breeze stilled. Tubbo fell to his knees, gasping for air.

“I could have you begging me to listen to your Name. Asleep like your friend at the Winter Court. Tie up your mind in so many webs that you’ll never see reality again.” Schlatt said, his tone deceptively light. “But I’m not going to do that right now. Instead, you get to have your fun and pretend like you have a chance. But if you ever disrespect me like that again, the fun is over.”

Tubbo sniffled, rubbing at his eyes. They felt raw and sore from the wind. He shivered as the breeze wafted through his hair.

“Understand, kid? I’m gonna need an answer from you.”

“I understand.” Tubbo said sullenly. His mind was racing. None of that was good other than the fact Schlatt wouldn’t be stepping in right now.

But he could later. And it worried him that the rug could be pulled out from under him at any time.

“That’s better.” Schlatt said, satisfied. “I don’t want to do that to you, kid. I really don’t. So don’t push me like that again.”

“I won’t.” Tubbo said. He’d have to be more careful with his words in the future. He slowly pushed himself to his feet, glad he had been in a little sand valley at the time. He would have fallen hard if the wind pushed him at the top of a dune.

“Don’t be so bland.” Schlatt said. The breeze playfully tugged at his hair and Tubbo swatted at it, predictably hitting nothing. It made him feel better though, even when Schlatt started

chuckling at him. “Here, I’ll even answer a question for you. Completely free, no strings attached. Will that make you feel better?”

Was he seriously trying to placate him like a child?

And worse, it was working, curiosity overriding his anger.

“How are you talking to me?” Tubbo said. “You didn’t answer my original question earlier. Dream shouldn’t like this at all.”

“Easy.” Schlatt said. “That Fae has as many schemes going on the side as I do, though it might be better to call them games. I just have to convince him that it’ll be worth his while to let me project myself a bit.”

Tubbo mulled that over. How did this benefit Dream? And would that benefit or hurt him? Would others like Technoblade be able to make this same deal?

“Aw, look, he’s got his scheming face on.” Schlatt said, laughing. Tubbo snapped out of his thoughts, scowling. “I was so proud of you for that Blaze trick. The looks on their faces were priceless.”

“Priceless enough that you’ll get me the Spring Charm?” Tubbo tried. The breeze chilled a bit and he shuddered.

“Kid. Don’t push it.” Schlatt said. Tubbo nodded. Luckily, it didn’t look like he had pushed Schlatt over the edge. “And nah, that won’t work. You’ll need to go through that trial yourself.”

“Darn.” Tubbo said. It had been a bit of a longshot but he would have appreciated the break. He kicked at the sand, wondering if he was going in the right direction. He was pretty sure he was, but directions in the Veil were odd.

“Try not to act cute.” Schlatt drawled. “I’m gonna have enough trouble dealing with Dream as it is.”

Tubbo bristled at the implications. “I didn’t try to get his attention! I didn’t try to get anyone’s attention! I wanted to be left alone!”

He still didn’t fully understand why Schlatt or Dream had taken such an interest in him. They spoke as if he was someone special, someone who, of course, would have their attention. And yet, he hadn’t done anything special to get it.

Others had completed Schlatt’s trials. Others had won Dream’s games. People who were brave, intelligent, beautiful, or untouched by the world’s cruelty had all passed through the Courts. Tubbo could even understand Tommy who was clever when it suited him and who was so bright that it almost hurt to look at him sometimes.

Why of all people, of all the stories he heard, was he the one dealing with this?

“I know that face.” Schlatt said. “It’s your ‘I’m thinking very hard’ face. Why not tell me what you’re thinking about so I can tell you what you should think about it?”

“Are you trying some sort of reverse manipulation on me?” Tubbo said. How could he believe anything Schlatt would say with a set up like that?

“Am I?”

“You definitely are.” Tubbo said, pulling the jacket tighter around himself. Despite the heat of the End, he still felt very cold. “Why do you even care?”

It didn’t benefit Schlatt at all to care. Tubbo was wise to his tricks by now. He refused to let the Fae King distract him with promises of family and safety while Tommy was still trapped in the Winter Court. Any information about how Tubbo felt was useless.

“I’m your dad, kid.” Schlatt said and Tubbo stumbled, his mind catching onto that word. It kept running around his head, over and over. Dad. Tubbo couldn’t really remember ever using the word and yet now it was stuck in his head.

“No, you’re not.” Tubbo said. The words were suspiciously choked up though. His throat felt like he had tried to gargle with rocks. “There’s the whole ‘different species’ thing to consider. I definitely don’t remember you around during my childhood.”

He could almost swear he heard Schlatt mumble ‘a pity’. But that seemed a bit unlikely? Pity for what?

“That doesn’t mean you can’t talk to me.” Schlatt said, his voice low and coaxing. It tugged at something inside Tubbo, the words spilling out before he could stop them.

“I don’t understand why you both were interested.” He said. “I’m not doing anything interesting. I just want to finish my Quest, reunite with Tommy, and go home. Go back to living a normal life with no Fey around.”

Tubbo coughed, covering his mouth. It felt like the words had been forcibly tugged out of him. So much for friendly conversation, he thought sourly.

“Why wouldn’t I be?” Schlatt said, the words dripping with honeyed poison. Tubbo clamped a hand over his mouth, trying to resist the draw to speak, to let it all pour out. “Aw, did Tommy not appreciate you enough?”

Again? Tubbo growled. “Don’t bring him into this.” He said. No one could cast judgment onto Tommy and his friendship. Ever. “We’re fine.”

“And yet, you can’t even understand why others would be interested in you.” Schlatt said. Tubbo shuddered, shaking his head like he could shake the words out. “Surely it can’t be because you’re clever and determined to succeed no matter what.”

“Other people are like that too.” Tubbo pointed out. He could name several stories that describe people like that. None of them got adoption offers from Fey. A few of them ended in gory death, in fact.

“But I like you, kid.” Schlatt said. “I like the way you smirk a bit when you have a plan and when given the chance, you’ll ramble off about convoluted schemes and chaos.”

“You don’t even know me.” Tubbo said. But the defense was weak and he knew it. He hated how easily Schlatt could get under his skin.

“I know that your favorite treat is gingerbread.” Tubbo stumbled in shock. “I know that you hunt for Tommy because the other hates killing animals. I know you love bees and want to have a special building for them someday. I know a lot about you.”

“How?” Tubbo choked out. There was no way Schlatt could have learned all of that. Gingerbread maybe, someone in town might have seen him and Tommy arguing. But the hunting thing? The bees? Those were facts he had only told Tommy.

For a moment, he felt a sliver of doubt but Tubbo dismissed it instantly. Tommy wouldn’t have broken his trust and shared those facts. He was asleep right now anyways. But then how did Schlatt learn them?

“Question for a question?” Schlatt offered slyly. “Same rules as last time.”

“Fine.” Tubbo said, gritting his teeth. He needed to know how Schlatt had learned those facts and whether it could come back to bite him later.

“Wilbur told me.” Schlatt said. Tubbo blinked, confused. How would Wilbur know those facts? “He’s been sifting through your friend’s mind, getting an idea for his likes and dislikes so he can spend a ludicrous amount of time painstakingly rearranging his new room. When he heard I wanted to adopt you, he reached out with what he learned.”

Tubbo felt like the world was greying out. “He’s going through Tommy’s mind?” He whispered, not believing his own ears.

“That’s two questions for me.” Schlatt said. “You might really need a nap, kid, because the answer to that one is still yes.”

He made a strangled sound of horror, wobbling a bit. Going through Tommy’s memories. Schlatt just announced it like it was nothing and yet.

For all of his openness and energy, Tommy was a private kind of person. Tubbo was his best friend and even he didn’t know all of what happened to Tommy before he met him.

And here was Schlatt talking about Wilbur violating Tommy’s privacy. Getting to look at memories Tommy wanted kept safe. Looking at memories that were special, like the day Tommy and him first met.

“That’s not okay.” Tubbo finally forced out. How could Schlatt not see that? “Tommy wouldn’t want that.”

“It’s helpful for him too.” Schlatt said, still infuriatingly calm. “Wilbur can go a bit overboard when he wants to decorate.”

“Tommy wouldn’t want that.” Tubbo insisted. If Wilbur wanted to know Tommy, he should befriend him like a normal person. Not peer through his memories.

The thought of it made him feel sick.

“If it makes you feel better, I won’t mention it.” Schlatt said. Tubbo let out a ragged laugh, feeling like his last nerve was frayed. If it made him feel better.

The only thing that would make him feel better was winning.

But could he even win? In his mind’s eye, he could see the torn apart Enderman. Dream said he would let Tubbo get close to winning before tearing it away. Schlatt said he could steal him whether he wanted to go or not.

“You’re not going to let me win, are you.” Tubbo said, his voice shaking a bit. He had been trying so hard. “That’s why you’re telling me all this. Because there’s no risk. I’m not going to win.”

“See, I knew you were clever.” And for a moment, Tubbo could almost feel the hand combing through his curls. “You’ll get your fun but winning would be a bit too far, mm? And if you got too close, than Philza would have you killed. He’s only abstained for so long because of my interest.”

“Are you kidding me?” Tubbo snapped. He swatted a hand at his hair like he could swat Schlatt away. “I earned this win! I worked hard for it! Every Charm so far, I’ve earned fairly. And you guys are taking that away from me?”

“I’m not going to negotiate with you when you’re riled like this.” Schlatt said evenly. “Take a deep breath, kid.”

“What’s even the point?” Tubbo screamed. He felt like his insides were boiling, his hands shaking with the need to hit something just so he could feel like he was fighting. “What’s even the point of going this far if you’re going to try to rip it away from me?”

“You don’t have to.” Schlatt said and Tubbo wished he was here so he could punch him. “Say the word and you can skip to the good part, kid. Cozy bed, immortality, and the title of prince.”

“Fuck no.” Tubbo snarled. “Fuck that.”

“Why?” Schlatt said, his tone curious. “You said it yourself. You’re not winning it. The only real choice is whether you choose me or Dream.”

“And trust me.” He continued. “I’m far better than Dream. I’ve got a better domain for one, and I could actually turn those skills of yours into something great. With Dream, you’d be running around playing games for eternity.”

“Because I’m not going to let you have that satisfaction.” Tubbo said. “If you want me, you’re going to have to drag me, kicking and screaming the whole way. I’m not giving up on Tommy for even a moment.”

“I’m willing to do that.” Schlatt said. And Tubbo hated how even his voice was, how much it made him feel like a child for his justified rage. “Because that’s what good parents do.”

“Good parents don’t kidnap kids.” Tubbo snapped.

“It’s not a kidnapping.” Schlatt said, offended. “Kidnapping implies I’m doing something horrible to you.”

“By my standards, you are.” Tubbo mumbled, rolling his eyes. It felt like arguing with a brick wall. There was no way to convince Schlatt that this wasn’t what he wanted and that he should have a choice in the matter.

To the Fey, he *was* being a stubborn child. After all, what was a handful of mortal years compared to the centuries a Fae lived? There was nothing he could say to convince Schlatt of the value his mortal life held, even if one day it would end.

But he couldn’t give up.

Giving up meant willingly relinquishing Tommy and turning his back on their years of friendship and leaving him to people who casually perused his memories. Giving up meant losing all the progress he had made, both in his quest and his life.

No. Giving up was not an option.

“Go away.” Tubbo said, squeezing his eyes shut. It felt childish but he couldn’t talk to Schlatt any longer. “I don’t want to listen to you right now.”

“Alright, I’ll save my last question for later.” Schlatt said. A breeze ruffled through his hair. “I’ll be seeing you soon.”

The smell of gingerbread faded and Tubbo let himself collapse, wrapping his arms around himself.

He wanted to believe he could do this. That somehow, some trick he didn’t know yet or path he hadn’t found, there was a way out of his predicament. A path right back to Tommy and their little cabin in the woods.

But he could still hear Dream’s threat and Schlatt’s assured words and he knew that the Veil would never let them go.

But if they would take him, it would have to be kicking and screaming.

But right now, he was alive and he had two days left. So Tubbo did something he hadn’t done in a long time. Alone with nothing but the starless sky to keep himself company, he cried.

It was soft in the way of someone who had spent so long holding it in that they were too tired to really let it out. Hot tears streaked down his face and Tubbo roughly scrubbed them away with a sleeve, hiccuping.

He just wanted to go home and have a cup of hot chocolate and listen to Tommy's exaggerated stories.

All too soon, the tears stopped coming and Tubbo let out a ragged sigh. One more Court and then he'd have to figure out how to escape for real. Just one more.

And when he opened his eyes, he could see flowers blooming around his feet.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was interesting to write for sure.

White Camellias

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning: Minor body horror

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tubbo startled as warm arms wrapped around him, bringing him in close to a soft colorful sweater. He froze, half ready for a dagger to press into his back.

“So, you’re the Tubbo I’ve heard so much about!” Tubbo took a step back, happy they didn’t seem to be holding on too tight.

His breath caught in his throat. The woman watching him had shoulder length pink hair, matching pink scales dotting her cheeks like freckles.

Fey. Most definitely Fey. Tubbo took another step back, unsure if he should stay or run.

She smiled, showing sharp teeth. “It’s okay.” She said, “I’m the one you’ve been looking for. It’s nice to meet you.”

“Nihachu?” Tubbo said, still poised to run. He had enough experience by now to know that a Fey Royal taking an interest in him was a very bad thing.

But his luck couldn’t be bad three times in a row, right?

“Oh, don’t call me that.” She said, her nose face scrunching up in distaste. “Just call me Niki. What is your name?”

“You just said it.” Tubbo said, passively ignoring the request in her words. He hadn’t come so far to get tripped up by little traps like that. “So don’t you know it?”

“It was worth a try.” Niki said with a small shrug and a smile. “Are you okay? You look like you were crying.”

“Perfectly fine.” Tubbo lied, scrubbing at his eyes. They were probably still red, his face blotchy. He was an ugly crier. But there was no way he was going to tell this lady he’d been sobbing his heart out.

Besides, now that he had found her, he didn’t have to worry as much! After all, one more Charm and he could go get Tommy back!

“Your face says otherwise.” Niki said amused. “Is that normal for humans? That explains so much about the towns I visited.”

Tubbo stared at her in mute horror. How many people did she cause to cry? And why?

“It’s not.” He said awkwardly. “But I don’t want to talk about it. Do you know what I’m here for?”

“Maybe.” Niki said. She folded her arms, looking up at the sky. “Did you get lost? Plenty of humans get lost and wander a bit too far.”

Tubbo snickered. At this point, he almost wished he were lost. Being lost would be so much easier than this Quest. “I want to make a deal for the Spring Charm.”

“Hm.” Niki said, looking back at him. “I’ll think about it.”

“What?” Tubbo said. “You can’t think about it! I need it now!”

He flinched as thunder cracked across the sky. Niki’s eyes were dark as she looked at him. “I said I’ll think about it.” She said. “And if you want to do it now, then we can. But just be warned, there’s a storm imminent.”

Tubbo backed down reluctantly, gritting his teeth. He hated spring storms. Everything got muddy and it was difficult to see with the rain. And with his luck, storms in the Veil were even worse.

She had to strike a deal that gave him enough time to complete his Quest, he reminded himself. Or it would be cheating.

“Fine.” He said reluctantly. He really wanted to get this over with. “So, do I just-“

“Yes, yes.” Niki said. “I’m going to meet with someone real quick. Remain in this meadow and nothing will kill you. I’ll send someone to collect you soon.”

Tubbo tilted his head to the side, watching as she disappeared in a swirl of petals. The smell of fresh rain filled the air and he had to bite down hard on his lip to keep himself from lurching forward like he could grab the magic that briefly filled the air.

She wasn’t going far, he knew that much. Why else would she meet him? She wanted him to stay in this meadow for a reason.

Part of him wanted to leave it just to spite her. Tubbo considered that plan carefully before tucking it away. He didn’t want to risk delaying the deal.

And it might be nice. To have just a little break. The meadow was gorgeous and he could hear the faint buzzing sound of bees.

Tubbo grinned, heading towards the source. The meadow was gorgeous if he was to be honest. Soft green grass carpeted the ground but it was almost impossible to see under the vibrant flowers.

It was like a chaotic rainbow but somehow, all the flowers seemed to work together and become something oddly beautiful.

He had to be careful where he put his feet, unwilling to crush the flowers. One of the few tales he knew of the Spring Court was a particularly bloody one where a person was punished for crushing a single one of the Queen's favorite flowers.

And the bees-

Tubbo's smile widened. Bees flitted between the flowers. They were larger than the ones back home, the size of his palm, and covered in thick fuzz.

Absolutely adorable. He wanted to adopt each and every one of them. Surely Tommy wouldn't mind, he'd been talking about how they needed a pet.

Carefully budging the flowers out of the way, Tubbo sat in a relatively clear spot, watching the bees nearby. None of them came near him, obviously shy of the sudden stranger.

Could Fey bees sting, he wondered. They probably could considering how dangerous most Veil inhabitants were. But when he looked at them, he couldn't find it in himself to be scared.

It was a habit born of long practice, the way Tubbo kept perfectly still, the only moment being his breathing. He had managed to get bees to warm up to him before.

Not so much when they moved to the mountain but in the rare time that was spring on the mountain, he'd spend hours sitting in a meadow, watching the bees.

He had to bite his lip to hide a giggle as one particularly determined one climbed headfirst into a flower and came out covered in golden pollen.

That one seemed like a Tommy, he thought, resting his chin on his palm. He'd call it Tom Bee Innit. There was already a Tombee though that one had been named in a field beside the orphanage.

Still, it had been a special bee to him and he had refused to reuse the name. Tubbo watched as it clumsily rose back into the air, hovering.

"Oh, you're gorgeous." He whispered. "And you know it, don't you? You own this meadow. Everyone else is terrified of you."

Tom Bee Innit swayed slightly in the air, coming closer towards him. Encouraged, Tubbo kept talking.

"You're very intimidating." He said. "So I'm calling you Tom Bee Innit for now because I don't speak Bee. Tommy likes to say he's the most intimidating person ever."

The reminder made his heart twist but he was quickly distracted by the bee actually choosing to land on his knee. Tubbo made a sound that could only be heard by dogs and some Fey.

"You're so big." He whispered, absolutely delighted. Tom Bee was clearly heavier than most bees he had met but they felt as light as a leaf. They looked up at him, their insectoid eyes flashing in the light.

This was the best day Tubbo had had in the last week.

He balled up his hands, pressing them into his cheeks. "I really want to pet your right now." He confessed. "But I don't think it's a good idea because you're definitely intelligent."

And part of him knew he should be worried about how intelligent this bee was. After all, it was clearly responding to his voice and even the other bees had begun to drift closer.

But another, far louder part, was reminding him that these were absolutely adorable. If he had known these existed, he might have come to the Veil just to get a glimpse.

Okay, probably not. But they would definitely be worth it.

No stories had ever told him there were giant bees in the Veil. Clearly a travesty. He was going to have to file some kind of complaint, tell them that a few of the more redundant gory tales should be replaced with those about adorable bees.

"I wonder what kind of bee you are." Tubbo said, tilting his head to the side. "You look similar to a honey bee but your colors are more similar to a bumblebee."

"Both are beautiful of course." He said when he saw the antennae twitch. "But I'm just kind of curious. Or are you an entirely different kind of bee?"

Another antenna twitch. "Probably a different type." Tubbo said, nodding. "You're a great conversationalist."

Another antenna twitch. Tubbo smiled. He was kind of happy Niki had left him alone now. It had taken years to get comfortable with Tommy being there during his bee time.

The kids in the orphanage hadn't been horrible but most thought it was weird to talk to bees. They would oversalt his food and make him eat it, taunting him about being a Changeling.

After Tommy had arrived, things got better. Tommy had always been better at standing up to bullies even when it got him into trouble.

But ever since, he wasn't very comfortable with others being around. There were worse reactions than putting too much salt in his food.

"Tommy would like you." Tubbo said, letting the bee crawl onto his palm. "He would have said he didn't because he likes to be contrary but he would have loved you. He likes cute things."

Maybe they could come back someday and Tubbo could show him these bees, he thought. He frowned. Probably not.

If they somehow managed to escape the Courts, there was no way they'd be able to come back for a quick bee visit.

"A pity." Tubbo said, trying to not to jerk as Tom Bee explored his palm. It was surprisingly ticklish. He startled as another bee landed on his knee, waving its antenna at him. "I'm not a

flower, sorry.”

More waving. “Do you want attention too?” Tubbo asked. More waving. “I’m just going to take that as a yes, Spins.”

The waving looked distinctly content this time, he was pretty sure of that. “Are you two friends?” He wondered. “You look like you might be.”

The meadow looked quite big when he was wandering around. There was a chance there could be two rival hives but these two looked quite content to have the other nearby.

Tom Bee took flight, settling next to Spins. “Don’t try to confuse me.” Tubbo said, yawning slightly. The warm sunlight was making him feel a bit sleepy. “Spins has a crooked antenna, it’s easy to tell the two of you apart.”

He was answered by a cheeky wave from Spins, the bee nudging into his hand. Tubbo stared at it, lips pursed. It nudged him again. “Do you want me to pet you?”

Another nudge.

Barely restraining his glee, Tubbo gently traced two fingers down Spins’ soft fuzzy back. He cooed.

It was everything he had wanted and more! It was just as soft as he thought it would be, the little bee oddly warm underneath his hand. Tom Bee pushed Spin away during his next stroke.

“Don’t be greedy.” Tubbo said, yawning partway through. “I’ll pet both of you.”

He still had a bit of time left before Niki got back. Surely that would be time enough to pet these adorable bees?

Tubbo let his eyelids droop a bit, settling into a steady rhythm. After a few minutes, Spins flew off, quickly replaced by another bee crowding in.

“Thanks for not overcrowding me.” Tubbo said. This one didn’t acknowledge him at all, only coolly nudging his hand to get it going again. Strange, he hadn’t remembered stopping.

Then again, he was a bit tired. Tubbo kept lazily petting the bees, feeling his eyes fall more and more shut.

He startled as something fuzzy flew just under his nose, making him sneeze. Tubbo’s eyes widened and he blinked a few times. Spins was hovering in front of his face.

“Spins?” He said, frowning. How did he not notice the bee sneaking up on him? The buzzing wasn’t exactly subtle, in fact it was actually kind of loud.

Pretty soothing too, he thought, his eyes beginning to droop again. It was kind of nice. He hadn’t slept in so long.

Distantly, he could hear a lullaby playing. It sounded sweet and pretty and Tubbo felt his thoughts drift away with it.

He sneezed again, rubbing at his nose. Spins was hovering right in front of him.

Something was wrong. Tubbo felt a pit in his stomach open up. He could have maybe missed Spins the first time, lulled a bit by the serenity of the meadow, but twice?

“What is it?” He mumbled. Spins drifted a bit further away as if asking him to follow. Was Niki looking for him?

Tubbo pushed himself upright from his slumped position, slowly inching between the flowers. He was so tired he could barely move but he slowly maneuvered his way towards where Spins was hovering.

His hand brushed something rough and hard, unlike the soft moist dirt of the meadow. Tubbo glanced down, curious. What was a stick doing in a meadow?

And then his tired brain connected the dots and Tubbo was scrambling away with a yelp because that was a stick, that was a *human femur*.

Now that he was looking, he could see the bones half buried in the flowers, forget me nots blooming from the eye sockets of a skull, irises twining around a rib cage, a skeletal hand still clutching a dandelion. He could even see tattered scraps of faded fabric partially hidden in the flowers.

There was no sign of a struggle, Tubbo thought with muted horror. It was as if the person had simply fallen asleep until the meadow reclaimed their body.

And worse, the meadow already had a hold on him.

Even now as he rubbed at his eyes, exhaustion still dragged on him. He yawned widely before brutally pinching his wrist.

Focus, he thought. There had to be some kind of magic to this meadow. Something that caused him to crave slumber. He needed to figure it out before it dragged him down completely.

Niki had totally planned this, Tubbo thought, narrowing his eyes. There was nothing in her wording that had completely dismissed the idea of it being a trap.

“Stupid.” Tubbo mumbled. He wanted to leap to his feet and run but his limbs felt like jelly. He’d just fall into the flowers face first and then go into a sneezing fit because of the pollen-

“Of course!” Tubbo said, snapping his fingers. The poison had to be in the pollen! His exhaustion had grown worse when he was petting the bees who were covered in it. The bees were farther away now, back to exploring the flowers, but that didn’t mean the damage hadn’t been done.

He could see a dusty coating of yellow on his clothes and hands by now. Tubbo rubbed his hands on his pants, looking around. What was he supposed to do?

He watched up to comb a hand through his hair before freezing. His hand encountered something soft, nestled amongst his messy curl.

He tugged at it, gasping at the sudden spark of pain. It came away easily and he was left with a white camellia flower in his hand.

As he watched, a drop of blood fell from the end of the stem, soaking into the ground. Tubbo let the flower fall moments later, reaching up again. He could feel two more flowers just above his forehead, almost as if he had made a flower crown with two flowers.

They didn't hurt when he brushed against them, feeling oddly numb in an alien sort of way. Like tugging on hair and wow, he really did not want to think about that.

Tubbo didn't pull them out this time, staring at the fallen flower with muted horror.

It was a pretty clever plan, admittedly. Lure the visitor to the meadow knowing they would fall into an eternal slumber. Promise they would come to no harm because really, how could you feel pain when you were asleep?

But what to do about it? He couldn't leave the meadow. Even if he could muster up the energy, Niki had specifically stated she'd send someone to the meadow. By leaving it, he could potentially delay their deal.

Tubbo raised a hand to rub his chin before dropping it with a scowl. No need to spread the pollen further.

He couldn't destroy the flowers which was his next impulsive idea. If he destroyed the flowers, Niki might call for retribution. And after the Blaze rod incident, he wasn't sure if he could trust himself with fire again.

Reluctantly, he shelved the idea for now. Maybe if he got desperate.

"Which might be soon." Tubbo mumbled, yawning again. He felt like he could barely think with his mind clouded by exhaustion.

First off, he needed to slow down the poison's progress. Grimacing a bit, Tubbo gently tugged his bandana free from around his neck.

He had been hoping to continue keeping it at least partially hidden under the collar of his sweater to keep it from being an obvious target. "If they touch my bandana, I'm going to burn this meadow." Tubbo mumbled, tying it around his head so it formed a crude mask.

It wasn't going to be very effective and certainly not for however long it would be until Niki came back. But it would buy him a bit extra time.

Tubbo glanced around the meadow. There had to be a cure to the poison. Every Fey trap held the remedy, a cruel prank to play on its victims, holding the key to escape just out of reach.

For a moment, he considered eating one of the flowers. He could see a few of the more edible varieties and it would be a nasty trick to play if the source of the poison was also the cure.

It seemed easy.

Too easy.

“All of these flowers.” Tubbo said, looking around. He combed his hand through his hair again, wincing when he felt another flower added to the crown. “But I can’t see any signs of animals.”

Other than the patches that he now knew were hiding dark secrets, the meadow was untouched in its beauty. Such a lush meadow and yet it held none of the animals he typically expected to see in a springtime meadow. No rabbits made their way through the undergrowth, no shy deer trotting from one grazing spot to another.

Tubbo tapped his knee, glancing back. In fact, the only living creatures he had seen since arriving here were the bees.

As he watched, they drifted peacefully through their routines, never noticing the deadly poison that counted their bodies. “That’s surprisingly convenient.” Tubbo remarked. “To hide the cure among the caretakers of the poison.”

Slowly, he staggered to his feet, bracing himself before he could fall. Tubbo watched the bees, waiting for the sight of a crooked antenna.

There!

“I’m so sorry about this.” Tubbo said, gently scooping Spins out of the air. “But you helped me once so I want to see if I can count on you again.”

He held Spins carefully, not letting the stinger near his hands. “If you sting me, I might crush them.” He warned, not looking up. A threatening buzz had filled the air. “I really really don’t want to do that. I’d hate to hurt a bee.”

Wincing a bit, he tore away one of the scabs at his hand, watching as a drop of blood oozed out. Spins froze. “Guide me to the cure and you can have it.” Tubbo promised.

It was risky feeding his blood to Fey animals. While they couldn’t utilize it for spells or glamours like the upper echelon, it gave them a dangerous power boost.

Tubbo took a deep breath, letting Spins go. The bee hovered for a moment before landing on his hand. With an oddly ticklish feeling, the blood droplet was gone.

The bee took flight again and this time, Tubbo followed him, slogging across the meadow. He nearly fell a few times, exhaustion dragging at his limbs but he refused to stop.

If he fell now, he was certain he wouldn’t get up again. As beautiful as this meadow was, he was unwilling to stay here forever, another skeleton amongst the flowers.

As he walked, he could see the remnants of more unlucky travelers. Long rusted axes, tattered bags, and as much as his fingers itched to stock up, he left them alone. Stealing carried a far worse punishment in the Veil.

There was even a massive skeleton, the skull as tall as his hips. Or it would have been if the top hadn't long crumbled to make way for ivy climbing over it.

By the time Spins had led him to a hive, he couldn't feel his legs and the flower crown was one flower away from completion.

Tubbo eyed the hive dubiously. It looked like one of those wooden boxes he had seen in more upscale towns, the one for domesticated bees, except far larger. It towered over him by a few feet, casting a shadow on the ground. "This is it?" He said.

Spins landed on the top. Tubbo slowly approached, wary of the buzzing he could hear. Honey oozed out between the wooden slats, an unnaturally golden color.

"This should be it." He said. But he couldn't quite bring himself to step closer. It could be another trap.

He remembered listening to a tale of a town who had suddenly sickened and died after a disguised Fae had sold everyone honey that had been made from poisonous flowers.

Tubbo reached a hand up, shuddering when he felt a flower in what was once an empty space, completing the crown. He liked flower crowns, especially the ones Tommy wasn't, but this was horrifying.

Steeling himself, he stepped forward, dipping a finger in the honey. Nothing happened.

"Well, cheers." He mumbled to a silent Spins. Tubbo pushed the bandana up, licking the honey off his fingers.

His mouth filled with the taste of sugar, rich and pure. It tasted like the first day of spring when the air was heavy with the scent of newly bloomed flowers. He had to stop himself from going back for more.

Tubbo let out a relieved sigh as the exhaustion fell away. The crown in all of its alien glory was still present but he had at least stopped whatever timer was ticking down.

"Great job! I thought you'd never get it."

Tubbo jumped, spinning away. A Fae stood just behind him, smiling. He brushed their messy brown curls away from his eyes and Tubbo took an involuntary step back.

The Fae's eyes had no sclera or Iris. They were almost completely violet, the only break being a lime green swirl in the center. It was, Tubbo noted with horrified fascination, the same pattern as his sweater.

"Who are you?" Tubbo asked, tipping his chin up. He refused to let his guard down now.

“I’m Karl.” The Fae said. “Niki sent me to get you.”

Chapter End Notes

A white camellia flower generally represents purity or good luck. It can also represent the love between a mother and child, that the receiver is adorable, or mourning when used in funeral flowers.

The more you know :)

Forget Me Nots

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Karl.” Tubbo said. The word felt stilted and awkward in his mouth like he had finally woken up from a long slumber.

“That’s my nickname. Don’t wear it out.” Karl said, chuckling slightly. Tubbo stared at him, completely dead eyed.

“Karl.”

“Uh.” The Fae almost looks confused now, watching him warily like Tubbo was about to go for his throat. Wise. “Yeah I, uh, I just said that, that’s my name. It’s Karl.”

“Karl.” Tubbo spread his arms wide, trying futilely to encapsulate the mess that was the meadow. “What the absolute fuck is happening here!”

“Oh, that’s what you’re mad about!” Karl said. Tubbo idly wondered if he could get away with lunging at the other. One bite. That’s all he wanted.

Gods, not even a week in the Veil and he’s already back to biting people. He hadn’t seriously considered that option since he was a preteen. Okay, maybe more recently than that, but still. He had some measure of dignity, unlike Tommy.

“Yes.” He said. “I thought Niki said nothing would harm me here. And yet, I was left in a meadow that tried to kill me! I’ve currently got flowers growing on my head! That does not seem nonlethal to me!”

“Well.” Karl said. Tubbo had a feeling he wouldn’t like where this was going. “If you’re asleep here, you wouldn’t really die. You’d just transition to being part of the meadow. Your mind would join all those slumbering within the meadow and become eternal.”

Yeah, he didn’t like it. That had to be the biggest excuse he had ever heard. How was that any different from dying? He wouldn’t exist anymore.

“That’s not the point.” Tubbo said, frustrated. He pulled off the bandana, carefully wrapping it around his wrist. The jacket was still tied tightly around his waist to his relief. He had not been looking forward to walking back across the meadow if he had left it behind during the unending haze.

Gods, the longer he spent clear minded, the more horrifying it was. He could barely repress the urge to rip all the flowers out. He didn’t want to bleed in front of a Fae.

“Then what is?” Karl said, tilting his head to the side. Tubbo groaned. How was he supposed to explain his side to this Fae? After all, they were masters of dancing around the truth.

“It was a loophole at best and you all know it.” Tubbo snarled. It was like the Fey had to justify his hatred of them so often. Ugh. And they wondered why he was so against Tommy joining the Winter Court.

Tommy could be furious and even mischievous, but he was never cruel. Not on purpose. He’d laugh, pull some pranks, but when the cards fell, he wasn’t capable of killing someone in cold blood. The Winter Court would take that away.

“I mean, there was nothing to say that this couldn’t happen.” Karl pointed out. “You never asked whether the meadow would put you to sleep or whether in that sleep, you would join the meadow.”

That’s because most humans don’t have that kind of conversation, Tubbo thought. He ran a hand through his hair, shaking his head. At least he learned now to push for more information next time.

Honestly, looking back, his entire conversation with Niki had been a bit off. He had backed down so quickly during her refusal, watching her go with barely a peep. He wouldn’t be shocked to find out that he was already under the influence of the meadow at the time. But of course, if he questioned it, Karl would feed him another trite excuse about how there was nothing saying they couldn’t do that.

Don’t bite him, Tubbo reminded himself. He might have diseases.

“And you did so well too!” Karl said enthusiastically. “I didn’t even have to enchant the bees not to attack, they did all that on their own. You’re very good with them.”

Tubbo went a bit red at the compliment. “So, they do attack.” He said dryly, hoping Karl would get the hint. Spins bumped the side of his head and Tubbo reached up, letting the bee land on his hand. He couldn’t hold a grudge against the bees. If someone was attacked, it was probably their own fault. “And I’m guessing it would be a fatal attack?”

“Oh, absolutely, man.” Karl said. “They’re normally quite aggressive. One sting would be enough to kill one of your mortal armies.”

“Aw, you’re a terrifying one, aren’t you?” Tubbo cooed at Spins, petting him. Spins could be deadly if he wanted, he was cute enough to justify it. “Look at you, able to kill an army! I’m so impressed!”

Spins preened under his gaze, allowing him to pet him for a few more moments before taking flight. Tubbo watched the bees wandering the flowers with wistful longing before turning away. He couldn’t pet them all.

“Do you want to stop and pet them?” Karl asked, stepping closer. Tubbo took a step away, refusing to let him any closer than he already was. “I’m sure Niki would understand.”

“No.” Tubbo said, shaking his head. It was a tempting offer. Petting the bees had been the most calming experience of this entire trip. It was the first time he had been able to relax even if part of that relaxation had been due to a deadly pollen.

For once, there had been no ‘interested’ Fey royals, no trials, no terrible feelings weighing him down. He had been able to sit and breathe and just be for a little while. It was absolutely lovely, exactly what he needed after his embarrassing breakdown.

And that wasn’t even getting into being able to pet the massive bees that were adorably soft. If he had been one of the unlucky few who had stumbled through a mushroom ring or been lured away with a song, he would have lingered here for hours.

But that was exactly why he couldn’t stay. He had barely any time left. If he stayed here, there was no telling how much time that would waste, time he didn’t have.

And he had a good feeling that Karl knew that and knew that he would say no. The look in the Fae’s eyes was disappointment, not expectation.

Tubbo looked up at Karl, squaring his shoulders. “I’d like to go see Niki now.” He said. But he remembered Punz as well. “Will I have to pay you to take me?”

Looking back, Fundy had been practically kind, escorting him without payment. Then again, Tubbo reflected, he had known the path far better and knew where it would take him. But now, he didn’t have any time to waste walking along the path until it took him where he needed to go.

He had found Schlatt and Dream because they wanted him to find him. As amused as Niki seemed by his presence and despite the fact that she had to strike a deal with him, she didn’t have to make it easy. Maybe she would have, but after things with Dream had gotten... complicated, he wasn’t sure if she was going to help her ally or not by making things harder.

“Well.” Karl said, his smile widening. “That would be nice. Actually, it is required. Payment, that is”

“What’s your offered price?” Tubbo said. He knew he had the letter in reserve but after using it to distract Sapnap, he’d rather keep it for now. It might come in useful later. He had no idea what the trial would entail but he needed to be prepared for anything.

“Well, I have this little trip I need to go on.” Karl said. “But it requires me to remember quite a lot, keep an eye on a lot of things, and it’s hard to really get in on the action, you know? It’s be great if someone were to come along.”

Tubbo shook his head, mildly disappointed. “I’m on a quest.” He said. It was a pretty transparent trick, all things considered. “I can’t just leave it. I don’t have time for any adventures on the side.”

“It wouldn’t interfere at all.” Karl said. “See, my magical domain is time. We’d leave for the adventure and return right at the moment we left. No time will pass while you are gone and you will still have nearly two days left to complete your quest. It won’t count towards your week at all. You have my word.”

Tubbo stared at Karl. Time? He had known that the magic of Fey could reach all sorts of domains. Chief in the stories had been the varied magics of the Courts as well as all sorts of

glamorous, illusions, and trickery.

But time? No wonder Karl was high up in the Spring hierarchy. Time in a place as timeless as the Veil was powerful, having power over time practically made him a lesser royal.

His eyes narrowed. And far more dangerous. Even if his time interval was set, Tubbo had no idea if Karl could still toss a wrench in the works. The uncertainty made him uneasy. But it was also strangely familiar.

“You’re the Karl from those southern stories, right?” Tubbo said, thinking. He had heard a few of them from a traveler who had wandered into town and then right back out of it when they realized how close Winter territory was. One had mentioned a wanderer getting swept up in a series of trials, dragged through ancient battles of history while being watched by amused Fey. It was suspiciously similar to the Fae standing in front of him now. “With The Beast? Why are you here?”

“So, you’ve heard of me! Nice, I’m not often recognized.” Karl said, beaming at him. “I like hanging out here between challenges. Gives me some variety to see, new people to talk to. And makes it easier for my fiancés to visit then disappearing with The Beast on his travels.”

“That makes sense.” Tubbo said, mentally filing it away. It wasn’t likely to be useful, but it was interesting to connect to the story he knew.

“So.” Karl said, practically bouncing up and down. “You know I’m the real deal then, right? Are you in or are you out?”

Tubbo hesitated. Karl had to be telling the truth here. And he even had more evidence than the Fey inability to lie to support it. But it still made him nervous to be sidetracked with so little time left.

“This isn’t sabotage, right?” He said. “I won’t go with you and find out that this will exceed my week, right?”

“Nope!” Karl said, popping the p. “All of it will take place in a second, we’ll return a mere moment after we leave. And because you’ll be helping with my job and not working on your own quest, it won’t count as cheating on your quest. Like I said, you’ll return and it’ll be like nothing ever happened. Except that I’ll be guiding you where you need to be.”

It was a good beginning offer. Fey had to tell the truth which meant this side quest really wouldn’t interfere and he wouldn’t lose time. But that didn’t mean it still wasn’t risky.

“How dangerous is this?” Tubbo asked. “What will I be doing? Will I die?”

“Occasionally, I’m taken back in time to observe certain moments as part of my job.” Karl said. “I don’t know exactly which moments until it happens and then it unfolds for me. However, I usually have to act as an observer and can’t experience it. Your job will be to become an active participant and to really experience the scene. I’ll see through your eyes what you see for the duration of it.”

Yeah, that fell in line with what he knew about Karl.

“But will it harm or kill me?” Tubbo pressed. He wasn’t going to trip up now.

“No.” Karl said. “I swear that I will bring you back safe and alive.”

Hm. Should he risk it?

Tubbo rubbed his chin. On one hand, he’d have the letter the entire time. If anything happened, he could use it to bargain his way out. But on the other, why not skip the risk and use it now?

“It seems like a pretty heavy price for so little reward.” He said doubtfully. Karl snorted.

“So little a reward?” He said. “I’ll be taking you to Niki. You won’t have to wander around and stumble into danger.”

“Niki’ll have to make a deal with me eventually.” Tubbo pointed out. “As long as I stay on the path and I’m careful, I should be able to wait it out. So, yeah, I do think the price is a bit unfair.”

“Well.” Karl said. Was it just him or does the other’s teeth look sharper now? “Do you want the deal or not?”

“You’re avoiding the question.” Tubbo said evenly. “I don’t see why I should take the deal. I’ll get what I want eventually.”

“Hm.” Karl said. “I guess I can sweeten the pot a bit. Take the deal and I’ll settle your debt with the Queen.”

Tubbo stiffened. “What debt?” He asked warily. He hadn’t done anything to incur a debt. He hadn’t touched the flowers or killed the bees. He hadn’t even made a deal yet.

“What else? You ate Fey food, didn’t you?” Karl said. He continued on, ignoring Tubbo shaking his head. “Those bees are the Queen’s and any honey they make is hers. You’re bound to the Spring Court until you pay that off and the price is extra high because you stole.”

“But that doesn’t make any sense!” Tubbo protested. “If I didn’t eat it, I would die! It was never offered to me and I paid for it.”

“You paid the bee, not the Queen.” Karl said with a shrug. “And like I said, you wouldn’t have died. Just... slept.”

“That’s a thin loophole and you know it.” Tubbo snarled. But worst of all, he didn’t know if he could escape this one. It operated on the thinnest of lines and it would be hard to argue.

Of course they had to add some kind of catch to it, Tubbo thought to himself. He was pretty sure he could bargain for passage with the letter but he doubted he would be able to bargain the debt too.

“No, harm, sabotage, or killing me.” Tubbo said. Karl nodded. “And this will not interfere with the time I have left.”

“Not at all.” Karl said. The sharper teeth had vanished again. “It’ll be like you never left. All you have to do is complete one simple quest for me. A couple days in the past at most. In return, you will no longer hold a debt and I will guide you to the Queen.”

Tubbo took a deep breath. It was risky. But the contract was pretty good and he didn’t like his options otherwise.

If he had bad luck three Courts in a row, trying to bargain with a debt put him at a massive disadvantage. Niki could force him to stay and fail his quest.

But that didn’t mean he had to like it. Worst comes to worst, he’d use the letter and deal with the debt on his own.

“Fine.” Tubbo said, gritting his teeth. “I agree to this deal.”

He wobbled a bit, watching as it seemed to flicker from day to night to day again within seconds. The hole in his chest yawned open and he winced, half regretting it already.

“Fabulous.” Karl chirped. “Let’s begin now then.”

The Fae’s hand was icy cold where it wrapped around Tubbo’s wrist. Tubbo tried to pull his hand away, yelping as he was pulled forward. “Don’t move too much.” Karl said. “I’d hate to lose you.”

The smile on his face told a rather different story.

Tubbo nearly vomited as the world lurched around him, stumbling as he was pulled forward.

For a brief moment, he was standing in a shining white castle. In front of him was a gnarled tree as snowy white as the world around him. Karl clicked his tongue. “Not the right spot.” He said. “Let’s see. There we go, let’s go here.”

Tubbo yelped again and he was yanked forward, stumbling into an entirely different world. His eyes were wide as he looked around.

They were out of the Veil. The forest they were in lacked the creepy perfection of the Autumnal Grove or the Summer Forest. It felt like midsummer and once again he was reminded that mountain clothes weren’t a great idea then.

“Where are we?” Tubbo asked. “Or rather, when?”

“We’re at a rather interesting moment in history just outside of a sleepy little village.” Karl said. It almost sounded like he was reading out of a book as he pulled Tubbo forward. “This village isn’t well known in your time as most don’t like such a story.”

They paused right behind a rock outcropping. In the distance, Tubbo could hear the faint sounds of a village, the clatter of tools and the whispers of conversation.

“Why not?” Tubbo said. He’d heard lots of stories that were bloody, gory, or that were technically outlawed by most societal rules. What made this so different?

“Because this is the village that went mad.” Karl said. Tubbo shivered a bit. Bit pretentious but that was definitely a creepy name. “It’s one of those things humans don’t like to talk about, going mad.”

“This village is peaceful now, but soon that peace will be shattered when one of their members is slaughtered. Desperate, they vote to hang their own neighbors in hopes of catching the murderers.”

“What am I doing here?” Tubbo asked, wary. He knew Karl wouldn’t let him die but still, he was worried about where they were. “It sounds like you know a lot about it.”

“I do.” Karl said. “I’ve come to this village many times to watch these events unfold. But I can only watch.”

“I thought you said that you didn’t know what would happen until you got there?” Tubbo said. Karl smiled at him placidly.

“No, I said as part of my job, I’m taking back to visit certain moments. Of course I don’t know what they are then.” Karl explained. “But it’s easy for me to revisit one from before.”

Tubbo pursed his lips, thinking. Which means this moment had been chosen for a specific reason. Figure it out and he’d be one step closer to creating a plan for how to deal with it.

But lynching? How was that supposed to play into it?

“What am I supposed to do then?” He said. “Waltz out, pretend I’m a traveler, and hope nobody notices they’ve never seen me before?”

“Of course not, that’d defeat the purpose.” Karl said, waving his hand. Because Tubbo clearly looked like someone who knew a lot about time travel and how it worked. “You’ll be taking the place of someone for this scene.”

“Taking their place? But wouldn’t that mess up history or something?” Tubbo asked, tilting his head to the side. As cool as it would be to end up in the history books, he didn’t mean like this.

“Nope! Once we leave, the scene will unfold again in the right direction.” Karl said. “Nothing you do here will affect history.”

“Okay.” Tubbo said, mulling that over. He could work with that. “What role do you want me to take?”

He was really hoping it wasn’t the role of the murderer. While he was willing to shed blood to get Tommy back, the thought of purposely taking a life made him queasy.

Which, of course, was what made it likely Karl could pick it. He bet the Fae would get a kick out of watching him struggle.

“You’ll be Robin.” Karl said. He pulled out a book from under his cloak, marked with the same spiral. “The lonely village orphan, you spend most of your time wandering the streets. I thought it would be easy for you to play.”

“Rude.” Tubbo said, flushing red. He had done that a lot with Tommy when he was younger, but he didn’t appreciate this Fae bringing it up. “What does Robin do in the adventure? What’s my goal to reach so I can finish this?”

He was half hoping maybe Robin solved the mystery. He was good at puzzles and had always wanted to try his hand at solving a crime.

“Oh.” Karl said, his eyes dancing with mirth. “You’re going to die.”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter took so long to figure out but it’s finally done.

Also, go check out Changing of the Seasons for a new chapter!

Asphodel

Tubbo stiffened. “You said that I would be returned alive and unharmed.” He pointed out, refusing to let his fear show. “Neither name nor time can change that.”

Karl tilted his head to the side, the very picture of a confused and hurt Fae. “Why would you think I’d let you die?” He said. “That’s pretty honking hurtful.”

“If I talk about the meadow, I’m going to start screaming.” Tubbo said, glossing over Karl’s weird substitute for swearing. Was the flower crown- Yup. It was still there when he reached up. Horrifying.

It didn’t hurt but he didn’t like thinking about the way the flowers seamlessly blended in.

“You enjoyed it.” Karl said with a shrug. Tubbo stared at him, wondering where he got that idea. “I mean, I guess it’s understandable you’re concerned.”

“Just a bit.” Tubbo said, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

“You’re not going to actually die.” Karl assured him. Tubbo kept his skeptical look. “Your goal is to enter a situation where you will. As soon as you do, I’ll take you back.”

That sounded... marginally better. Was this what Robin had to go through?

It couldn’t be hard to enter a fatal situation with murderers on the loose. As an orphan, he’d be a prime target with no family to push matters forward after his death.

He could already think of multiple ways, looking towards where the village was. All that was left was to enter.

“Wait,” Tubbo said, frowning. This seemed a bit too easy. “Is this going to be a specific situation I need to reach?”

“I was wondering if you’d catch that.” Karl said, far too cheery for someone who just tried to trick him and lost. “You will become the wild card of this trial, the jester if you will. Your goal is to convince the village you are the murderer and get lynched.”

Tubbo paled a bit. That sounded pretty gruesome. A straightforward murder was one thing, being lynched?

Was this what Robin had to go through? He felt the faintest stirrings of pity for the other, even if they had never met.

“What happens if I don’t?” Tubbo said. This was going to be manipulation on a larger scale than anything he’d ever done.

Usually if Tommy and him had even gotten a whiff they were being investigated or at risk of getting carted off by whatever child services a town had, they ran. No town was worth the

risk.

He had a few ideas but they were untried, untested. He also had no idea if they would survive first contact with these unknown villagers.

“Then you keep playing.” Karl said, far too upbeat for those chilling words. “As soon as the murderers are found or the last innocent is slain by the murderers, you will be swept back to the beginning to try again.”

Tubbo grimaced, rubbing at his arms to cover up his shudder. Hopefully he could win on the first try.

He knew that he would return to the moment he had left, but the thought of having to play this out for weeks or even months was nauseating.

“So, do I just stroll in or something?” Tubbo asked. He couldn’t resemble Robin that much. “And they won’t notice something is different?”

It could be beneficial if he wasn’t too similar to Robin. The village would be even more suspicious if a stranger arrived claiming they were a friend. But it could also work against him if the murderers made him a target.

“You actually look and act pretty similar to Robin!” Karl said. Tubbo flinched back as the Fae ruffled his messy brown curls. “And my magic will smooth over any inconsistencies like the eye color or clothing change. They won’t even notice if you do something different than what Robin would!”

How difficult would that last part be, Tubbo thought darkly. Most villages rarely cared about street kids, let alone knew enough to know if their personality changed.

“Without affecting me?” Tubbo said, eyeing Karl warily. “My eye color or clothes aren’t going to be changed, right?”

As much as it unnerved him, he was attached to the jacket he had gotten, the bandana, the clothes he and Tommy had made together.

And he was done with changes to his body because of magic. He already had far too many horrifying things to contend with.

“No, it doesn’t have to be permanent.” Karl said. Tubbo was pretty sure he wasn’t imagining the flash of disappointment in the Fae’s eyes. “It’s more of a glamour. Others will see you as Robin while your actual appearance will remain the same.”

“Good.” Tubbo said. “I’d rather not have any permanent changes. And the glamour will end once I return to the present?”

“You ask a lot of questions.” Karl said. Tubbo shrugged. He needed a lot of answers. “Yes, once you return to the present, I will return you to your original look if that’s what you’d prefer.”

“Of course it’s what I’d prefer.” Tubbo said, surprised. “Why would I want anything else?”

“You’d be surprised. You mortals always love change.” Karl said. Tubbo grimaced at the underhanded jab. He liked being mortal, but being called mortal felt rude in a way he couldn’t explain. “We receive so many requests from mortals wanting to be a few years older, a little younger, with prettier hair or enchanting eyes. The list goes on and on.”

“I suppose that can be a little frustrating.” Tubbo said slowly. Karl beamed at him. He wasn’t quite sure how he felt. On one hand, he was sure that being pestered for changes like that had to get annoying after a while.

But on the other hand, he knew quite a few stories where the person had a good reason or died horribly. Or their request was manipulated to the worst outcome.

“I’m glad you understand!” Karl said. He ruffled through the journal as if checking something. “Now, are you ready to start?”

Tubbo took a deep breath. “Yeah, I think I am.” He said. He shuddered as magic flickered over his skin, half hungry and half grossed out. It felt like the time he had accidentally walked into a huge spider web and had to claw it off himself while Tommy laughed himself sick.

When he looked down, he didn’t look any different. His clothes were still the roughed up sweater, jacket, and pants. The compass was still a comfortable weight deep in his pocket.

“The glamour is complete now.” Karl said from above him. Tubbo jolted, looking up. Karl was perched on one of the branches, holding his book and a pen. “All that’s left is to put it to use.”

“I know.” Tubbo said. He took a deep breath. It just felt so oddly weird to not be in the Veil anymore.

“I’ll be watching the entire time.” Karl said. Which would have been comforting if it wasn’t for who was saying it. “And occasionally speaking. But that doesn’t matter right now, no one but you will hear anyways.”

“Okay.” Tubbo said. Honestly, people finding out he had a Fae speaking to him would probably be a net benefit.

He steeled himself and walked towards the village, pretending he couldn’t hear the humming behind him. The faster he got this done, the better.

He peeked around the side of the building, leaning against the worn bricks. It looked normal. Like one of a thousand villages he had passed through before.

The houses were arranged in a circle around a fountain. There was a roughly hewn stone podium nearby and he knew that would be used for the town leaders or for travelers bringing warnings. It almost filled him with an odd sense of nostalgia.

It didn't look like a village that was going to go mad. There were flower boxes in one house's window, another house had a carefully tended vegetable garden. Little human things that set them apart.

None exactly screamed murder.

Tubbo drew closer, hearing voices. There was an odd feeling in his chest, both anticipation and fear all in one.

It had been so long since he had seen people who weren't Fey. Not since he had seen Tommy back in the Winter Castle. And even further back, he and Tommy had only visited the nearby town when necessary. And always together.

This would be his first time in years going to a town without Tommy. He didn't think he liked it that much.

A small crowd was gathered by the fountain. Tubbo hesitated, not sure if he should join or not. Would showing up be more or less suspicious?

He nearly jumped out of his skin when a hand pressed against his back, spinning around. "Sorry." The man said. His voice was so deep it sounded like he had swallowed a handful of gravel and yet managed to be so cool. "Didn't realize you were standing right there."

"It's alright." Tubbo said, drinking in the sight of him. There weren't any weird scales, or glowing eyes, or horns. The man looked perfectly normal, other than his vividly blue eyes.

Tubbo frowned, noticing the man was actually staring over his shoulder. "You're blind?" He said, a bit surprised. That explained the eye color though he didn't like how his thoughts now jumped to magic.

"I'm glad that I passed so well that even you forget it." The man said but there was a warm smile on his face. "Come on then. I know it makes you nervous but we can't wait here."

Tubbo nodded, flushing when he realized his mistake. "Yeah." He said lamely, realizing he did not know the other's name. The other snorted.

He kept watching the man out of the corner of his eye as they walked. There was a thin cane in their hand that he had missed on the first glimpse, feeling out the area in front of them.

They didn't look like a murderer. But Tubbo had too much experience with kind looking murderers.

"Do you know what this meeting is about?" Tubbo asked, glancing up. Just a bit further and they'd be in hearing range of the crowd. It was the prime time to gather information.

"No." The man said, frowning. "But Cornelius sounded worried when he invited me. So, I don't think it's good news."

It's about the murders most likely. Tubbo frowned. But when he counted the crowd, there was one for every house. Unless some lived together, it didn't look like anyone had died yet.

How odd. There weren't any funeral arrangements either. From the look of the houses and Karl's words, he could guess that no new people had moved in for a while.

Why would someone in what looked to be a peaceful close knit village turn to murder?

He sneaked a peek towards the trees. And could Karl have something to do with it? Or another Fey?

Not for the first time, he really wished he had heard this story.

"Catboy!" Tubbo jolted out of his thoughts, looking up. Another person had split from the crowd, walking over to them. "And Robin, it's good to see you around."

Catboy. Tubbo grimaced a bit. He didn't really want to put names to faces. At least one of these people would be dead soon.

"Cornelius." Catboy greeted. Even better, two names at once! Ugh. At least he was going to own this acting. "It's good to see you. Is something going on?"

"You could say that." For a second, Cornelius' smile wavered, becoming more tired and worn. "It's about those travelers last month. I- the mayor will be making an announcement soon."

"What about them?" Tubbo asked. He flinched back when the two men glanced at him. He shouldn't have interrupted, now they were going to tell him to shut up.

"It's nothing much." Catboy said. "There's just been a few concerns."

He was seriously about to break character just so he could press forward in his questioning. What had happened? And how could he use that information to further his goal?

There was something wrong with this village. Not in the magical sense that made his chest ache, but a bad feeling that curdled in his stomach. He just couldn't put his finger on what it was.

"Attention please!" Tubbo turned around, frowning. A tall man was standing on the podium, looking over them.

Despite the attempt at a smile on his face, his eyes were panicked and his hands shook. "I know you're wondering why I've called you here."

"Is it about the noise complaints?" Tubbo craned his head, seeing a lady in ambiguous garments. "Because that's just how I am. And you guys can't shame me into stopping."

"I wish we could." Someone mumbled in the crowd. Tubbo felt like an outsider looking into an inside joke.

"Well, maybe I should visit you tonight." She challenged. "Then you'll understand,"

“Enough!” The mayor yelled. He sighed, reaching up to pinch the bridge of his nose. “Yes, the noise complaints are an issue but we will not be addressing those right now.”

Tubbo felt a warm hand land on his shoulder. When he glanced back, Catboy nodded at him. Trying to comfort him.

He tried not to think about how bizarre the gesture seemed now without the mad glint in a Fae’s eye as they looked at him.

“As you might have heard from the traveler last week, the infection is spreading.” Infection? What kind of infection? “After doing a bit more research, Cornelius suggested that that traveler may have been infected himself.”

As one, the crowd turned to look at Cornelius. The man shuffled awkwardly, clearly unused to speaking in front of large crowds. “I asked around.” He said. “And apparently it’s common for a ‘concerned traveler’ to come by right before outbreaks.”

“Oh skies have mercy.” Catboy mumbled. Tubbo looked up at him. Was this infection responsible for the village going mad?

Would asking questions now seem more or less suspicious?

“It’s nothing to worry about.” The mayor said. “It might be a coincidence and we’re all panicking about nothing.”

“Or we’re all about to get murdered in our beds.” One man said, taking off his straw hat to show dark hair. His dark eyes surveyed the crowd. “And by our own neighbors.”

There! Again! They clearly implied that something weird was happening! “What-“ Tubbo began but he was cut off by Cornelius.

“We’ll be going into the outbreak period soon if the infection reaches us.” Cornelius said. “We’ve taken a few measures to safeguard the houses. Everyone will need to stay indoors all night. No one leaves. If you want, you can double up but it might be best if we remain alone.”

“Staying in the same house is like shooting fish in a barrel.” Straw hat man objected. “Someone should stay on watch to catch them in the act.”

“And then you kill them.” The woman said. Straw hat man spun around to face her. “Yeah, I said it. What are you going to do about it? Gonna kill me?”

“What-“

“That’s enough.” The mayor snapped. “All of you are spinning this out of control. We do not want paranoia and hatred to consume our village. We’ll pull through this.”

“We’ve come up with a few measures for how to handle an outbreak.” Cornelius said, averting his eyes. “We’ll finish setting it up this evening.”

“A gallows.” Catboy mumbled. Tubbo jerked, looking up at him. That must be how they would lynch people.

Lynch him. Tubbo shuddered.

“It’ll be fine.” Cornelius assured. “I’m certain that we will work this out without anyone getting killed.”

Tubbo pursed his lips, feeling the first stirrings of guilt. He knew from Karl’s words that Cornelius would be wrong. The people he was standing with would dwindle in number.

He wasn’t even certain whether any of them would survive at all.

He glanced at Catboy’s hand before looking away. It shouldn’t matter to him. This was history and there was nothing he could do to change it. These people were already long gone.

And yet, he still wished he could help them. But that wasn’t his role. His role was to obscure their view with smoke so they’d kill him, someone innocent.

Not for the first time, he wondered what Karl wanted from this whole affair. This was rather a lot of effort to show him this piece of history.

The mayor coughed as if he could dispel the tense atmosphere. “We’ll finish putting it together tonight. I know one of us had investigator training and there is also a doctor in this village who could assist if someone is injured.”

“As if anyone will survive.” Tubbo heard from behind him. But when he turned his head, craning a bit to see around Catboy, he couldn’t see who might have said it. Cornelius looked at him quizzically and Tubbo reddened, turning back.

“Who’s the investigator and the doctor again?” Tubbo piped up. He tilted his head to the side, hoping he looked like a dumb little orphan who, of course, would forget those people.

“They are.” The mayor paused, his head tilting to this side. His eyes went a bit hazy as if he had been suddenly struck on the head. “I’ll be keeping their identities secret for now so they won’t be struck down tonight.”

“Wise.” Catboy whispered. But Tubbo thought differently.

That wasn’t cleverness or scheming he saw. That was someone desperately searching for an answer and coming up with nothing.

How could the mayor of a tiny village not know who the doctor was? Or someone who worked as an investigator? It didn’t make any sense at all.

“How will we know who to visit then?” Tubbo pressed. The mayor looked at him and glanced away as if not hearing.

“Everyone should finish up their tasks and head home.” He said. “Cornelius, Jack, you help me set up the... device.”

Tubbo nearly yelped as he was gently pulled to the side. “You should head home.” Catboy said quietly. “A child shouldn’t have to see this kind of thing.”

Tubbo snorted despite himself. He shouldn’t see a gallows? He had seen plenty of them while Tommy and him were roaming. In his hair was a flower crown that nearly killed him. His chest still aches when he sees magic and around his wrist was a bracelet the Winter Court would kill him for having.

It was almost laughable. How innocent was Robin?

“Alright then.” Tubbo said. He took one last look around the crowd. Who will be dead tomorrow? And who would be their killer?

Catboy nodded. “Stay safe.” He said before turning around and walking away. Tubbo tilted his head before shaking it.

Compared to all the other weirdness of this village, people leaving the orphan to themselves was practically a breath of normality. And as kind as Catboy was, Tubbo was wary of him.

You didn’t have to see to kill.

He picked a likely looking house, heading towards it and hoping the glamour would cover any mistakes. The house was the plainest with no garden or outside decorations, likely because it’s owner was still young.

The door swung open easily when he pressed on it and Tubbo frowned, examining it. They couldn’t even update the locks? That seemed like it would be pretty important right now.

He ignored the bed, closing the door and slumping to the ground. That simple conversation, even though he had been a bystander for most of it, had been draining.

And not to mention confusing. Tubbo pressed his head into his hands, thinking it over. Somehow nobody knew who the doctor or investigator was, there was some kind of infection occurring, and the most logical solution was to build a gallows.

Slowly, he pushed himself to his feet, walking over to the one window. He pressed himself against it, looking out. The first reds and oranges of the sunset painted the clearing.

He had never realized how much he missed watching the sunset. The Veil had operated by its own rules.

Of course, it was rather spoiled by the gallows that was slowly being constructed. Tubbo winced, scanning the forest. Karl was somewhere inside, watching everything. Maybe even using his eyes right now.

Did Karl have something to do with these oddities?

Maybe he should arrange a time tomorrow to see if he could get a meeting. He needed more information to construct his plan or his lie would fall apart.

He settled down at the window to watch. Maybe it was Karl's magic, maybe an after effect of the Veil or whatever this place was, but he didn't feel tired or hungry.

If he wasn't going to sleep, there wasn't much else to do but watch and wait. If anyone tried to kill him, Tubbo wanted to see them coming.

Tubbo watched as the sunset faded into cool twilight, as the last three people broke off and went to their own houses.

He hummed, resting his cheek against the cool window. Who could it be? None of them had seemed like killers but he also hadn't seen anyone clear of suspicion.

Hopefully he'd catch a glimpse tonight and could use that to build his plan as he went forward.

The scene outside the window crept slowly into nighttime. Tubbo surveyed the houses, not seeing anything. How long would he have to wait?

The moon peeked over the trees.

And then everything went black.

Not in the unconsciousness sort of way or the darkness of the End, but pitch black. It was like his window had been suddenly painted over, the world outside gone.

Tubbo backed away from the window, towards the door. Despite its poor latch, it refused to open when he tugged on it.

And in the back of his mind, he heard a whisper.

"Night one begins."

Daisies

Chapter Notes

Warning: Mentions of hanging

This is Tales of the SMP inspired, but a bit modified for the AU and to be a bit more realistic.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tubbo felt his breath come in quick pants, backing away from the door.

That- that explained why no one bothered to watch for a murderer. A complete blackout of the outside world. The murderers could be walking towards his house and he would never know.

He stumbled backwards, collapsing onto the bed. Nervous energy thrummed through him. He wanted to hide. He wanted to run, flee into the forest with the knowledge that whoever wanted to find him would have to battle against gnarled roots and painful brambles.

This had to be one of the worst experiences yet, second to losing Tommy, Tubbo thought as he buried his head in his hands.

Because before, with the Fey, he had options. He had lied, and ran, and fought. When he was cornered on a cliff, he jumped. When he fought Dream, he used magic. When he was trapped in the flower field, he found the cure.

He might actually die here with no real way to resist other than the strength in his exhausted limbs.

Well. He had other tricks up his sleeves. The bracelet chimed softly when his arm moved and Tubbo let out a slow breath, trying to ease the corresponding flare of pain.

He didn't want to use that though. Not now and risk Karl claiming he cheated.

There was nothing he could really do here, he thought, frustrated. The doors and windows were locked. The only place he could hide was under the rickety old bed and as short as he was, there was no way for him to curl up so small that they wouldn't catch a glimpse when he walked in.

All he could do is sit and wait.

Tubbo slumped back on the bed, staring at the ceiling. He'd have to be more prepared tomorrow. Surely there were some kind of weapon around, even just a branch he could break

off.

He shifted a bit on the bed, frowning. It was comfortable, but weird sleeping on such a small bed. For years, there had always been another person when he reached out. He'd say that he hadn't slept alone since before the orphanage but that would be a lie. It had been the first sign something was wrong with Tommy and he had missed it.

He hates sleeping alone even more now, regretful memories ringing the action. Tubbo rolled over, frowning. What was another sleepless night. He hadn't slept in days.

For a moment, he felt a fleeting sense of longing. To be back under autumnal trees or in the warm desert. At least he knew what they had wanted from him even if he didn't understand it.

At least he wouldn't be lonely, some bitter part of him whispered. He'd be warm, taken care of.

Tubbo shoved that voice down with brutal efficiency. He wasn't a child. He didn't need or want someone to take care of him.

He wrapped his arms around himself, waiting for morning to come. Trying to think about anything else then autumnal woods or deserts.

This had to be magic work, he thought, sneaking a glance at the window. It didn't make the chasm grow but there was no way this was normal. He knew his fair share of history and he would have known if nighttime caused this in the past.

So, first. Was it Karl? He wouldn't put it past him. But that seemed a little... out of character?

The Fey were creatures of patterns. They'd break them occasionally to go after prey, yes, but the broad majority of Fey stories tend to repeat themselves.

Tubbo tried to piece together the scraps of stories he knew about Karl before shaking his head. And this definitely did not fit Karl's pattern.

From the stories he knew, Karl's pattern was more about throwing people headfirst into the past then creating deadly games like these. He could see Schlatt doing it, definitely, and Dream as well.

Those two probably would have gotten a kick out of a paranoia inducing game like this.

Maybe The Beast, Tubbo thought, propping his head in his hands. But no, those games were usually more obvious. Prizes were given to the winners to stoke the competition into a fever pitch.

He groaned. Even Wilbur of the Winter Court was more likely to construct a game like this.

So, was Karl an observer or was there another Fae here? And would they try to interfere with his mission?

“There were so many mysteries at play here.” Tubbo whispered into the air. And at the root of them all was why Karl wanted to show him this.

Out of all the moments of history, why this village and its deadly game?

He blinked as light suddenly flared through the window, raising his head. Instead of the pitch black of before, he could see a cloudless blue sky.

Day two begins.

“Afternoon already? Did I fall asleep?” Tubbo mumbled, pushing off the bed. But no, that was impossible. He didn’t feel groggy or like he had finally slept. He was definitely just as sleep deprived as before.

And yet the glaring light outside him told him hours had passed instead of maybe a handful of minutes.

Tubbo frowned, looking out the window. People were already drifting out of their houses to gather by the podium again. None seemed startled by the sudden change in time.

Well, he thought, at least he knew Karl definitely had a hand in this. How much he was still unsure of.

Time to face the music though. Tubbo pushed the door open, scampering over to the crowd. Nobody spoke, the tense atmosphere from yesterday had returned and smothered any conversation in its cradle.

Tubbo tried to ignore the small spark of relief he felt when he saw Catboy walk out of his house, cane sweeping the ground for obstacles.

But there was definitely one less person from yesterday when the group came together.

“Miles is gone.” The dark haired man from yesterday said. He didn’t have his straw hat now and his face was haggard. He looked like someone had dragged him out of bed too early.

Tubbo wondered if he looked the same way. Really, he just felt numb. He didn’t know who Miles was. Had never spoken to him.

Was it normal, not to grieve at a moment like this? Or was it the effects of the Veil?

He had heard stories of those who came back from the Veil odd. Unable to connect with people like they used. They’d ignore their loved ones’ cries for help or abandon their family like they never knew them.

Usually it ended with them returning to the Veil.

But I won’t be like that, Tubbo reminded himself. He really only had one person in this world and that was Tommy. As long as he had Tommy, he’d never step foot here again.

“Did anyone notice anything odd last night?” The mayor said. “Anyone sneaking around or acting suspicious?”

Tubbo waited for someone to speak up, to mention how the night had gone dark and silent. How their door had locked and they had waited in anticipation for their possible death.

But no one did.

“I didn’t see anything.” Cornelius volunteered. “Were there any clues in his house?”

“The trademark signs of an outbreak.” The mayor said. Again mentioning an outbreak. Tubbo mentally noted that.

An outbreak had different possibilities. It could mean a swarm of the minor Fey causing chaos or a higher Fey creating some new disease to cause chaos.

It also implied that whatever this was, it was something that had a widespread effect. Tubbo shifted, thinking hard. But in that case, how had he not heard about it?

He could list off over half a dozen massacres and outbreaks over the last decade alone. News of those always spread fast as people desperately scrambled to protect themselves. He and Tommy had left town and traveled as fast as they could if there was even a whisper.

How far back in the past was he?

“Tubbo.” Tubbo jolted out of his thoughts as his shoulder was shaken. He looked up into Cornelius’ green eyes. “Do you have an alibi for last night?”

“What- I-“ Tubbo glanced around at the crowd. Catboy looked away from them. The mayor smiled at him but it was a tired, bitter smile. Everyone else looked mad.

Oh. Oh he knew those looks. Those were the ‘you’re an orphan so clearly you’re to blame looks’. When one was scared for their own life and looking for a scapegoat, what easier target was there than an orphan? No risk of revenge from family.

“I-“ Tubbo quailed back, half afraid and half acting. He’d have to play this perfectly. “I couldn’t have done it! Do I look like I could have killed a fully grown man? I’m not strong enough.”

“If it’s taken hold of you, you could have.” Cornelius murmured. Tubbo noted that down. More information was always useful.

“I just- please, I know I’m an orphan, but I’d never do that.” Tubbo pleaded, leaning into the orphan bit. He’d buy some confidence back and then undermine it. “My parents raised me right, even if they’re dead now.”

That got some people to waver. “Then the only other suspect is Jimmy.” The woman pointed out. Who was Jimmy?

“I wouldn’t have done it either.” Tubbo stared confused as the mayor spoke up. “I was good friends with him, I would have never hurt him.”

Did he misread this situation? Was this man not the mayor? But no, he had been the one to stand on the podium and make a speech. Every sign pointed to him being the mayor.

But then why was he a suspect? Especially if no one had seen anything. Most towns believed wholeheartedly in their leaders. Tubbo had seen a few that had practically been glorified slave towns and yet who still swore that their mayor was the only person protecting them from the Fey.

Either something was afoot here or whatever this outbreak was, no one was safe. Or maybe they just didn’t like their mayor.

He was pretty sure he was going to become the boy who went mad from all these questions.

“So we have two people both swearing their innocence.” Cornelius said with a sigh. “Well-“

“I’m the doctor.” Tubbo piped up. He seized the moment, pushing on as they turned to look at him. “I wasn’t going to say anything at first but you’ll be making a huge mistake if you lynch me.”

It was perfect. At any moment now, the real doctor would speak up and denounce him. After all, who could believe the teenage orphan was the doctor? It made no sense at all. Even if he was fairly good at patching people up, that didn’t make him a doctor.

He watched in anticipation. Any moment now, the reveal would happen and he’d be done with his quest.

And then Catboy nodded. “That makes sense.” He murmured. Tubbo stared at him in shock.

“I suppose you should be killing me then.” Jimmy said ruefully. “Seeing as it would be the better choice to leave the doctor alive.”

What? No! It didn’t make any sense! He didn’t have any training as a doctor! Why would the village orphan be a doctor?

Did he misread this? No, he couldn’t have. The house had been completely bare and he hadn’t seen a doctor’s office around. There was no way Robin could have hidden any of the tools he would have needed.

Tubbo watched in mute shock as Jimmy finished making his case and was pushed to the gallows. Dimly, he felt a warm hand settle on his shoulder.

“That was a near escape.” Catboy said. “But I believe you. I don’t think you’re the killer.”

“You think I’m the doctor?” Tubbo said. Because surely this had to be a joke. Surely, the doctor had been off daydreaming and was about to stand.

“I do.” Catboy said. And gods, he sounded sincere. He tugged Tubbo’s shoulder, forcing him to turn. “Don’t look.”

Tubbo wheezed, a hysterical laugh that didn’t have the strength to slip out. Don’t look? He had seen far worse than this.

Distantly, he was pretty sure Karl was laughing. He would be laughing if he had seen something like this happen to someone else. Hysterical, bordering on the edge of uncertain, but still.

How did this place work? He could feel Catboy pull him forward, hear the gruesome crack and sound of weeping behind him. But he kept turning the problem over and over in his head.

That should have worked. There was no reason it shouldn’t have. Even if Robin had been the doctor, then why had the mayor dodged the question? There were rules here, some kind of twist at play, and he had no clue what it was. He was floundering for reason in a mad town.

Ironic, he supposed.

“You should keep your head low.” Catboy said. “Everyone’s paranoid right now. I’d hate for them to slip and you get caught in the crossfire.”

“Mm.” Tubbo said. Really, he was pretty sure he had bigger concerns. He just put a target on his back and he didn’t want a knife in it.

“I’ll leave you for now then.” Catboy said, looking up. Tubbo followed his gaze, mouth falling open in shock. “Don’t want to stay out too late.”

No. No. Tubbo may not know other people well sometimes but he knew how time worked. It had just been a bright afternoon and now he could see dark violet and red streaks stealing over the sky, turning it to twilight.

When he looked back, everyone was disappearing inside of their houses. Jimmy was gone, the gallows empty.

“Good luck.” Catboy said sincerely, walking up the path to their house. For a moment, Tubbo wanted to call after him and beg to stay the night.

But no. He turned away, walking towards his own lonely house. Catboy was nice but staying with him would lead to disaster.

Either he’d get caught in the crossfire of the killers making their move or he’d be a murderer himself. As cruel as Tubbo admitted he could be, he wasn’t going to use an innocent as bait.

Hopefully he could hold onto that sentiment, he thought, pushing the door open. Because he was about to die for it.

He could stay positive but what was the point? He would do the exact same thing if he was in their shoes. The risk didn’t seem like a big deal when he was standing there, convinced there was a real doctor.

Even if Jimmy had been a killer, they had talked about it in the plural. There was at least one more murderer out there. And if they believed him, he'd definitely be next on their list.

"First things first." Tubbo mumbled. He clapped his hands together. "Find a weapon."

He hadn't had success looking around because of the twilight truck and now he didn't have much time left before the darkness fell. He'd have to move fast if he wanted to be prepared. He was desperate now and willing to consider anything, no matter how foolish.

He went to the bed first, ripping the blanket off. The wooden frame was rickety and Tubbo frowned as he ran a finger across it, barely avoiding splinters.

It was sturdy but only just. It'd break on the first hit and he'd be left defenseless.

If he could even get a hit. He was strong and fast, but also short. Outside of an argument, he was not above admitting that may be an issue.

But if anyone else mentioned it, he would fight them to the death.

Blanket then, he decided, picking it up. It wasn't a great weapon but it was better than nothing. As soon as his hand wrapped around the corner, the dim light filtering through the window vanished.

Tubbo took a deep breath.

Night two begins.

He braced himself, watching the door. It was still an agonizing wait, trying to see who was coming. If they were coming.

The door knob rattled. Turned.

He didn't see who it was. Only the shadowy outline of a figure. The flash of a blade in their hand was all that he needed. It didn't matter if he wouldn't truly die. He wasn't looking forward to finding out how being stabbed felt.

Tubbo threw the blanket at them, dodging around them. There was a slight breeze against the back of his neck, a curse from the struggling figure behind him. And then he was out in the night.

It was pitch black, which was the first thing he noticed. He could barely see the outline of the houses and further, the forest. He didn't bother looking behind him, knowing he wouldn't be able to see who the killer was.

If he survived this would be useful evidence, he thought with a touch of hysteria. There had to be something magical concealing the killers from being discovered.

For a moment, he hesitated, wanting to bolt towards a house. To safety with another person. But it wouldn't really be safe, would it? Just another victim.

There was a thudding sound as his door slammed open, hitting the wall. Tubbo sprinted forward, hoping the killer couldn't see him in the dark.

He ran for the forest, heart thudding hard against his ribs. He had hidden in forests before, knew some plans for running and dodging and maybe even fighting.

It should be okay. He should feel confident now that he is out of the house. He had options now.

But he didn't. Because the scene seemed to blur. One moment he was running through the cool darkness and the next, he was racing amongst the sand dunes.

Focus, Tubbo told himself. But it was like a worm, constantly crawling back to the front of his mind. Reminding him of that bone deep terror he had felt.

He ducks into the trees, weaving in between them. The footsteps behind him have slowed a bit. By the time he's within the trees, they were much farther behind him.

Tubbo scrambled up the first sturdy tree with branches he could reach, not relaxing until he's high above the ground. He scanned the ground, but the killer didn't appear. He frowned. Did they really give up so easily?

"Having fun?" Tubbo yelled, grabbing onto the tree before he could fall. Karl was sitting next to him, smiling despite his precarious position.

"Do you just like sneaking up on people?" Tubbo asked. Karl laughed.

"You guessed it!" He said. "Nice escape earlier. I wasn't expecting that."

"Yeah, well, I didn't feel like getting murdered." Tubbo said. "Are you the one causing the uh, weird day and night thing?"

"What weird day and night thing?" Karl asked. Tubbo glared at him. "Oh that? No, that isn't me."

"Then who is it?"

"Why should I spoil it?" Karl said, swinging his legs. "You're not here to solve mysteries. You're here to die. That's all you should be focusing on right now."

"That means it's important." Tubbo said. Karl glanced at him.

"That right there is why you keep getting Fey interested in you." Karl said. "I can definitely see it."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Tubbo asked, looking up at him. Dream had talked a bit on why Tubbo had interested him but any new information was welcome. He still didn't understand it. "I mean, considering I just escaped a murderer, I think I've earned a freebie."

"Pft, yeah, fine man. I'll tell you this for free." Karl said. "You've got a bit of Fey in you."

“Like, metaphorically or what?” Tubbo said, confused. “Because yeah, I guess, I messed around with stuff I shouldn’t have.”

“No, like.” Karl ran a hand through his messy hair. “You know how it’s cute when dogs do things like humans?”

“You think I’m a dog?” Tubbo said. He looked at Karl, debating if he could push him off the branch. The penalty might just be worth it.

“Not like that! I, ugh-” Karl thought for a long moment, fingers tapping on the cover of his journal. “You’re selfish in an interesting way. And it’s cute how you try and scheme and plan against people with centuries more experience than you. Fey like seeing themselves in those they plan to adopt.”

“I’d adopt you if you wanted. Me and my fiancés like the idea of having a child eventually.” He continued. Tubbo shook his head. “Oh well. I’ll try again later.”

“I’m good, big man.” He said. He really didn’t want more Fey on his plate. But at least the information fit in with what he was told before. Tubbo paused. “You say Fey like you’re not one.”

“Old habit.” Karl said. “I used to be human.”

“Really?” Tubbo said, looking at Karl. He certainly didn’t look like it. Tubbo couldn’t really imagine Karl as someone human.

“Yeah, man.” Karl said. “I was one of the lucky ones. Got brought in to one of The Beast’s games. He thought I was funny so he left me alive and kept inviting me back. Eventually I just... Stopped going back to the mortal world. Found the book and spent about a century figuring it out and trying not to kill myself with magic. Less adoption and more stumbling into it.”

“Huh.” Tubbo said. He couldn’t really imagine not going home. He had loved the cozy home he had built with Tommy.

But then again, where was home without Tommy? If Tommy chose to stay, where would he go?

Tubbo shook the thought away, deciding not to dwell on it. It didn’t matter right now and he wasn’t going to work himself up about it. “I don’t plan on staying here, big man.” He warned.

“That’s funny.” Karl said. “I said that to The Beast once.”

There was the soft ticking of a clock before Karl vanished as if he hadn’t shot Tubbo right through the heart with his words, as if he had been nothing more than a dream to torment him.

And through the tree branches, Tubbo could see the sun rising, painting the world a bloody red.

Chapter End Notes

Would have finished this earlier but Final Waltz had a tight hold on my brain cells.

Lilies

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tubbo wasn't sure how he had gotten back to his house.

It all felt like he was in a fog. Logically, he knew that he had to have climbed down the tree and made the long trek back to the house. Had stayed alert and paranoid with every step, but there was no shadowy figure coming for him.

But it didn't feel real. He didn't feel like he had made it back. Some part of him still lingered in that conversation, lingered over those last words.

By the time he cleared the trees, it was daylight again. Nobody even looked at him when he rejoined the group.

Try as he might, he could only muster up a few flickers of curiosity. It might be just the glamour covering up the grass stains on his clothes and haunted look in his eyes.

All he could think about was the look in Karl's eyes when he said that. Acceptance. Something tired. And cruel Fey amusement over it all.

But most of all, the emotion he saw was *pity*.

Tubbo stared at the grass, replaying that moment over and over in his head. That was two times he had met someone who had joined the Fey.

Had they wanted to escape like him? Karl's words hinted so. The look in Punz's eyes when he talked about Purpled, soft and sad, was another hint.

But neither had been successful. Both of them, unique in their own ways, had joined the Courts and become just as dangerous. Was he going to be next? Would he be the one someday with a sad look in his eyes, speaking fondly of mortal days long gone?

Tubbo shook his head. He doubted he'd even get to express discontent over it all. Punz and Karl had been adults and becoming was rather different than being adopted.

He wrapped his arms around himself with a shiver, remembering Schlatt's sure voice, Dream's amused tone. They'd strip his memories from him for sure. The orphanage, the cottage, all of it would be hidden behind a dense fog he couldn't hope to reach through.

Wouldn't want him to be a flight risk, Tubbo thought darkly. Wouldn't want him remembering what it was like to be loved freely and not possessed.

"Tubbo?" His head snapped up as someone touched his shoulder, lashing out. Cornelius stumbled back, eyes wide.

Tubbo froze. "Oh, I'm so sorry." He whispered. He twisted his hands together, nervous and embarrassed. Cornelius winced a bit as he righted himself. "I was deep in thought and you scared me."

"It's fine." Cornelius said, waving a hand. "I shouldn't have startled you. I just wanted to tell you that it's over now. We voted without you, didn't think you'd be comfortable voting. You never voted before."

Tubbo swallowed hard, refusing to look at the gallows. "I wouldn't have." He said, voice a bit harsh. "Been comfortable that is."

Part of him knew it would have to be him up there soon. It berated him for his inaction, for standing and thinking when he could have been scheming.

But another part of him was tired. It wanted to lie down and take a long nap. Forget about his impending death.

At least he didn't have to vote. Nobody had made him vote during any of the meetings and he wasn't going to do it any time soon. Getting himself up there felt rather different then putting someone else up there. He swallowed hard, feeling a bit queasy at the thought.

They might be murderers but he'd never schemed like that. Part of him kept back up plans, just in case, but those had been to protect him and Tommy. Not for situations like these.

"You should head back to your house soon." Cornelius said, his voice interrupting Tubbo's thoughts. "It's not safe to be out after dark."

Tubbo nodded stiffly, turning away and walking towards his house. Halfway there, he froze.

Why should he go inside? He hated it there. Hated how the door would lock and trap him. Hated the smothering darkness. If it hadn't been for the killer opening the door and his distraction, he'd been dead.

Really, what stopped him from staying outside? What stopped any of them from staying outside? His botched manipulation had already ruined his chances of ruining this loop. He might as well do some experimenting.

A small grin slipped onto his face as he walked around the edge of the house, pressing his back to the wood. From this angle, he'd be hidden from the other houses.

If he was lucky, maybe he could see what house the killer emerged from. If he wasn't, then he'd at least know he could roam around at night.

Tubbo watched the shadows with bated breath. The sunset arrived in the clearing with a wash of color before beginning to give way to cool twilight. Any moment now, the darkness would arrive.

"You're cheating."

Tubbo jumped nearly a foot in the air, head snapping up. Karl was leaning against the wall next to him, uncomfortably close.

“I’m not cheating.” Tubbo challenged. He wasn’t going to let Karl order him back in like a dog. “There’s no rule saying I have to stay inside at night.”

“Well, yeah, because no one does it.” Karl said. Despite the calm tone of his voice, his hands were restlessly fidgeting with the book. “Murderers are allowed to make their deliberations in private.”

“Then they can just deal.” Tubbo said. There was nothing in their deal saying he had to follow that rule. “I was out last night too and that didn’t matter to you.”

“I honking know that!” Karl said. He rubbed a hand over his face, pouting a bit. “That’s different. You’re the doctor, you saved yourself then.”

“That still doesn’t make any sense.” Tubbo mumbled. He spoke again, louder. “That can’t I just preemptively save myself? That solves the problem quite nicely.”

Look, if Karl was going to waver him off with mysterious statements while Tubbo was recovering from post near murder, he could deal with the consequences. Tubbo was the doctor now. Was he maybe a bit too hyped up on adrenaline? Probably! But that didn’t make what he was doing wrong.

“No, you can’t!” Karl said frustratedly. “If you break the rules like this, you’re going to get in trouble.”

“So be it then.” Tubbo said after a long moment. He was tired of being nice. He was ready to go a bit insane. Maybe he’d finally get to see who was behind all of this, check it off his bucket list.

Karl let out a frustrated sigh. “Is there really no way I can persuade you to go back inside?” He asked. Tubbo contemplated a range of options. He could ask Karl to leave him alone. To get him out of this nightmare and clear his debt. To explain what he had said earlier and what had happened to change his mind.

“No, I think I’m having a good time here.” Tubbo said. He leaned against the wall, the very picture of relaxation. If relaxation came with a boatload of stress and was running on nothing but spite. “You have a nice time lurking in the woods, being creepy.”

Karl shook his head. “You’re almost as stubborn as Sapnap.” He grouched. Tubbo frowned. He’d like to think he could do a bit better than that but he’d take what he could get. “Fine, the hard way it is.”

Tubbo took a step back, raising one arm to defend himself. He knew he had been playing it risky with this but he couldn’t back down now. There was no way he could remove himself from the situation without the possibility of it being taken advantage of.

He startled as a cool hand wrapped around his wrist, looking down. It didn't hurt and the bracelet wasn't on that wrist. But that didn't mean he liked it. "Let go." Tubbo snapped, shaking his wrist to try and dislodge Karl's grip.

"Next time, don't try to cheat." Karl said. His smile was wide and his teeth sharp. Tubbo straightened himself up, preparing to try and talk his way out of a painful punishment.

And then the world spun, softening around the edges. He blinked up at Karl, wondering when he had laid down. Had he laid down? He couldn't remember why he would do something like that. He had been- had been doing something. But now he was just so terribly tired, the exhaustion dragging at his mind.

Tubbo sluggishly tried to push himself up. He couldn't fall asleep here. Not with a Fae watching him, ready for when he'd be completely defenseless. He squeaked as his arms gave way, sending him crashing back down.

A firm hand pressed down on his chest, keeping him from trying again. Tubbo looked up, blinking blearily through the shadows. Karl made a small clicking noise, settling down beside him.

"Stop moving, you're just going to hurt yourself." He scolded, but there wasn't any heat to it. Tubbo blinked at him slowly, the cogs in his head trying to get back into gear. There was something wrong about this but he couldn't put his finger on what. He was forgetting something, he was sure.

A hand combed through his curls and Tubbo tilted his head forward, trying to dislodge it. It didn't work. Karl just laughed as if he had done something very funny.

"Look at you." He said. "You're so adorable like this. I could do anything right now. I could drag out your precious new friend, what was his name Catman or something, and slaughter him in front of you. Trap him in the Inbetween for a century or two and drop him in front of you, raving mad and begging for death. And you'd just keep blinking at me like a startled little rabbit."

Tubbo was certain there was something wrong with what Karl was saying. But he just couldn't think right now. It felt like his mind had been submerged in honey, dragging his thoughts to a snail crawl. His head fell back to the ground, he was too tired to keep it craned at the same uncomfortable angle.

Karl laughed again. Tubbo let out a small whine, hoping the Fae would take a hint. But the hand didn't move away from his hair.

"I could steal you away right now." Karl said idly. Tubbo shook his head, not quite understanding the words but knowing they were bad. "There's nothing you could do about it. By the time you would awaken, it would all be over. Time is my domain and I can do as I wish with it."

"This is addicting, almost." Karl continued. "I can see how Schlatt and Dream became so quickly fond of you. I just want to pile blankets on top of you and trap you in a time loop you

can never leave.”

“No.” Tubbo said, the word slurred and barely recognizable. He didn’t want that to happen. He wasn’t quite sure why, because blankets and time to sleep sounded lovely, but something inside of him screamed that he should fight. “S’not the. S’not the deal.”

“I think you’re misunderstanding the power dynamics right now.” Karl said. There was a shuffling sound and Tubbo made a small noise of alarm as he was picked up. It was surprisingly comfortable, Karl’s jacket was soft and smelled like flowers. Tubbo felt himself go limp, his head resting over where Karl’s heart would be.

There was no heartbeat but he was too tired to feel afraid.

“I’ll let you go for now.” Karl said, laughing softly. “You can have your freedom for a bit longer. I kind of want to see what you’ll do in the village. This has already been the best loop in years and I look forward to whatever chaos you cause next.”

“And if you get lost along the way, then I suppose I’ll be able to snatch you away anyways.”

“Screw you.” Tubbo said with a huff. He yawned, feeling the rumble of a laugh from Karl. “You look ugly.”

Distantly, he could hear a voice in his head screaming. But it was too muffled to make out the words. Tubbo let his eyes slip shut, the claws of slumber finally pulling him down. Whatever it was, it could wait.

When he awoke, it was to a bland wooden ceiling. A new blanket had been draped over him, replacing the one he’d thrown at the killer. Tubbo stared at it for a moment, enjoying the pleasantly groggy feeling of finally sleeping.

A few seconds ticked by. “I’m going to kill him.” Tubbo said, his pleasant tone not showing the murderous intent he was feeling. He rolled over, burying his head in the pillow so he could avoid the sunshine streaming in through the window. He patted the jacket tied around his waist, relieved to find the letter still there.

Half of him was calculative. His original goal had been stymied but he had learned a lot. For one, he couldn’t stay outside past nightfall though the why was still unclear. The other was that Karl was far stronger than he looked. He wasn’t exactly bulky but he didn’t expect the other to carry him so easily.

The other half of him just felt deeply afraid.

Karl had pushed him to sleep with just a touch. And yes, while it might have partially been due to his previous exhaustion, it had seemed practically effortless to the Fae. Tubbo chewed on his bottom lip, running over the events in his head.

There had been absolutely no way to stop it other than turning back when Karl asked him to. The magic had been instant with no room to dodge or fight back. Not that he could have a

viable way to fight back without cold iron or salt. But he didn't think he could concede to Karl forever. If he did, the Fae could easily lead him around in circles for the rest of eternity.

For a moment, Tubbo wished he had been a little bit better prepared. Brought along cold iron, salt, even one of those hokey charms that he was pretty sure did absolutely nothing but amused the Fey. At least it would have been some sort of comfort.

He shook his head, pressing deeper into the worn pillow. If he had any of those, one of the Fey would have likely killed him before he got past the Autumn Court. He had survived this long because he was non threatening enough to be amusing. Having a weapon would make them take him seriously and he wouldn't have survived that.

It rankled him that he had to be seen as weaker to survive. It made sense, fit in perfectly with his plans, but still.

Tubbo let himself have a few more moments of peace before rolling out of bed. He'd attend the next lynching. He didn't think this loop was salvageable but at the very least, he might get some kind of useful information. Hopefully, the next one voted out would be the other killer.

He was pretty sure one of the previous lynchings had been correct considering only one showed up to kill him. While it was possible that only one had decided to come, considering how there was only one death every night, he was pretty sure the previous were likely a joint effort.

He grimaced. Juggling so many variables was hard work. Any of his theories could be brutally undermined without any notice. He pushed the door open, unsurprised to see that they had already started without him. For a moment, he considered going back inside and finally having a full mental breakdown. Would they even notice?

Tubbo shook his head, closing the door behind him. He had already gotten out of bed, he might as well go see what was happening.

Nobody looked at him when he joined the crowd. Tubbo frowned, keeping tabs on the conversation while he thought. He half expected them to have more of a reaction considering that people were turning up dead left and right. By judging by what he overheard, no one had even thought he was dead.

Had Karl done something while he was sleeping? Or did someone visit his house and find him asleep? Both of them were unsettling prospects. He slipped his hands into his pockets, rocking back and forth. Part of him wanted to ask Karl but he was pretty sure the Fae wouldn't tell him.

He glanced up when the argument suddenly devolved into chaos.

"You're the investigator?" Cornelius repeated. Tubbo followed his gaze, eyes widening in shock. Catboy stood there sedately, hands resting on his cane.

"Yes, I am. I've been keeping tabs on someone every night to see if they left their house." Tubbo glanced around, half expecting someone to speak up. It was impossible that Catboy

could be an investigator, he was clearly very capable. But how exactly was he keeping tabs? Was he allowed to leave his house at night? Or did he have very good hearing?

“Do you have information for this case then?” Cornelius prompted. After the death of the mayor, he seemed to have become the de facto leader of the group. He still wasn’t too sure if he was safe but he seemed to be doing an okay job leading the discussion.

He still wasn’t too sure on Catboy either. The man could be using the same tactic he had tried to use, just for a different reason.

“Nothing concrete.” Catboy said. “But I should have more solid information tomorrow.”

Could be a cop out. Could be the truth. Either way, he didn’t think he’d be seeing Catboy tomorrow. There was no way the imposter would pass up the opportunity to remove the investigator from the situation like they had attempted with him.

The rest of the meeting was far smoother. Tubbo started walking back as soon as the votes were cast. Behind him, he could hear angry cursing from the woman so he was pretty sure who had been voted.

Just a bit longer. He just had to keep collecting information and waiting to see who was the other murderer was. Then the loop would reset again.

He didn’t bother staying up this time, collapsing into bed. There were far less villagers than before, they had to be close to an ending. Tubbo propped his head up on the pillow, wincing as his hand brushed across the flower crown.

It was surprisingly sturdy. And even after a few days, the flowers showed no signs of wilting nor being crushed by him lying down. Tubbo grimaced. Quite possibly it would stay with him for the rest of his life, however long that was.

Tommy would make fun of it, he knew. Or be irritated how it prevented him from wearing a different flower crown. They had made them before, in the quiet days of travel. It brought a nostalgic smile to his face.

Granted, white camellias weren’t something they would use. Those were flowers for fancy gardens, not the typical wildflowers they found.

It... annoyed him for lack of a better word. He was certain that the flowers likely had some kind of meaning to them. But it irritated him that the flower itself was something pretty, meant to be shown off in a garden, rather than a wildflower.

Ugh, look at him now. Getting offended by flowers. If someone told him about this two weeks ago, he would have thought they were lying.

He rolled over, keeping one eye on the door. It was unlikely, yes, but he was still reluctant to let himself be murdered. Call him crazy.

Maybe that was Karl’s plan, he thought. Make him go out of his mind with paranoia until he couldn’t tell what was truth or lies.

Jokes on him. He was already paranoid.

Tubbo sighed. He wanted to go home. He was tired of this place already. The letter was practically burning a hole in his pocket, begging to be used.

One more loop. He'd stay for one more loop after this. He was almost to the end, what more could Karl throw at him?

In the morning, they lynched Cornelius.

Catboy cried, even though he had been the one to give the information that led to his death. Tubbo looked away, taking deep breaths and trying not to think about curious green eyes and first meetings.

Cornelius was the killer.

Chapter End Notes

Tubbo finally gets to sleep! Too bad he didn't actually want to.

Black Dahlia

Chapter Notes

Warning: Brief mention of hanging, blood

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When the world restarts, it doesn't do so with a bang.

It's more of a sigh. One moment, he's kneeling on the grass, comforting Catboy as the other sobbed. One moment where he closes his eyes, trying to block out the death behind him and the agony of those left alive.

He'd lost. The last killer had been Cornelius.

And he opens them to a rough wooden ceiling. The cabin. He was lying on the bed that had seen better days but this time he wasn't tucked in. He wasn't sure how that made him feel.

Tubbo stared up at the ceiling, trying to organize his thoughts. He wasn't sure how he was so certain that Cornelius had been the killer and that this change was due to the loop resetting.

He just... knew it. Knew it with the same conviction that he knew the sky was blue and that he loved Tommy. Cornelius had been the final killer and his death meant he had failed the first loop.

It... stung. In a way he hadn't been expecting. It wasn't that he hadn't suspected Cornelius but having his suspicions confirmed made him want to bury himself under the thin blanket and try to forget when those green eyes had looked at him with kindness.

Chalk it up to magical insanity, maybe. Tubbo snorted, pushing himself up. This was a whole new chance and this time, he knew the cards in play.

The doctor plan had failed but that didn't mean he didn't have other plans. And this time, he knew who the killers were and who would die. Being the fall guy would be a snap.

His next step was slower, a flash of guilt leaking in as he remembered Catboy's sobs. Would the other cry for him when he died?

Maybe he could leave behind a note or a will or something. A clue for the villagers to end the game after his death, earlier than they did before. It might not be allowed by Karl but he would be dead by then.

Yeah. That would make up for what he was about to do. Tubbo pushed the door open, hoping that he looked calmer than he felt.

This time, he didn't jump when Catboy stepped up beside him. "I was hoping it wouldn't come to this." He said. "It's terrible, what's happening."

"It is." Tubbo said. He wasn't sure if he referring to the mysterious cause or the lynching themselves. Maybe both. The lynchings had killed just as much people as the killers did after all. "But this is what's happening now."

"You're far too young for this." Catboy said with a heavy sigh. Tubbo didn't answer him, staring at the ground. He'd already been here once before. "You should be safe and at home, not trying to find a murderer."

"Funny where life takes you." Tubbo said. He could certainly agree with the sentiment. He'd much rather be at home with Tommy right now. They'd be working on preparing the garden for the heavier snows and checking the seeds for the spring planting now if his sense of time was right.

It's funny, he never thought he'd miss having to turn over the soil and cover the ground with compost. Or maybe not missing the action so much as missing the normalcy of it, the way they'd pile on the bed afterwards and hide from the cold under the covers while bickering about what to plant in the spring.

He had been planning to surprise Tommy with a packet of apple tree seeds. Tubbo closes his eyes, lets himself rest in the memory for a moment, before opening them again.

He was so close. He couldn't afford to fail now.

When Cornelius joins them, he barely stops himself from flinching away. The other seemed just as calm as he remembered but now it was tinged with the knowledge that they were the murderer. No wonder they had remained calm.

"It's good to see you again." Catboy said, the corner of his lips quirking up.

"We just saw each other a few minutes ago." Cornelius answered, rolling his eyes. Well, that explained what would have happened if he had his like before. So, changing his choices had a confirmed impact on events. It was nice to have his theory confirmed. Tubbo tucked that knowledge away.

He would have been furious if Karl had tried to maintain a completely static game. It was much harder to plan around rehearsed lines and scripted events. Easier to bank on human nature.

Tubbo jumped at the mayor's yell, feeling himself flush a bit when Cornelius and Catboy looked at him. He had just forgotten about the argument! No big deal.

"As you might have heard from the traveler last week, the infection is spreading." Tubbo shuddered at the repetition. It felt odd to hear the same words again, to look around and see everyone listening as raptly as they did the first time. "After doing a bit more research, Cornelius suggested that that traveler may have been infected himself."

Gasps of horror. In unison, the crowd looks towards Cornelius. Tubbo feels his stomach churn. This was like a scene out of a nightmare. They look towards guidance, unknowing their guide was a murderer.

“I asked around.” He said. Asked around to who? In the first loop, there was barely any mention of other villages nearby. He hadn’t seen any evidence during his walks in the woods either. “And apparently it’s common for a ‘concerned traveler’ to come by right before outbreaks.”

Tubbo was pretty suspicious that the ‘concerned traveler’ was Karl. Karl was exactly the kind of person who’d find that funny.

“Oh skies have mercy.” Catboy mumbled. Something about that niggled at him but Tubbo dismissed it. It was probably just the deja by acting up.

“It’s nothing to worry about.” The mayor said. Tubbo snorted, shaking his head. He was pretty sure the mayor had been the other killer. “It might be a coincidence and we’re all panicking about nothing.”

Wait.

Was it just him, or did the mayor look different?

He couldn’t quite put his finger on it. It seemed to slither and slid out of his gaze, lingering at the corner of his eyes. Part of him insisted the mayor had always looked this way but there was a little voice screaming that something was off.

Was it a side effect of being the killer? Tubbo glanced at Cornelius, but nothing seemed different. He looked the same as before.

So why was looking at the mayor giving him such a headache? Could the mayor be under the same glamour that he was? It was possible he was seeing through some kind of glamour, but then, why didn’t he see through it before?

He tuned into the conversation, shaking his head to try and get rid of the after effects. Maybe he could try to interrogate Karl later. If-

If the Fae really loved him the same way as before, maybe he might be more willing to let things slip. But something inside of him shuddered at the thought of feeding into what the Fey thought was love.

“We’ll be going into the outbreak period soon if the infection reaches us.” Cornelius said. “We’ve taken a few measures to safeguard the houses. Everyone will need to stay indoors all night. No one leaves. If you want, you can double up but it might be best if we remain alone.”

“That doesn’t make sense.” Tubbo mumbled to himself. He hadn’t thought much of it before, but why stay in the houses? They were practically lining up to be slaughtered.

“Staying in the same house is like shooting fish in a barrel.” Straw hat man objected. Tubbo nodded along. “Someone should stay on watch to catch them in the act.”

“And then you kill them.” The woman said. Straw hat man spun around to face her. “Yeah, I said it. What are you going to do about it? Gonna kill me?”

It felt weird to listen to an argument he had heard before. Everything was exactly the same from the suspicious look in her eyes to the man’s snarl. He would have thought small bits would change without his interjection but it appeared his input was unnecessary?

Odd. Was this the flow of history trying to correct itself?

Despite his misgivings, Tubbo let the conversation continue on the same track. The less variables he had to plan for, the easier it would be.

“What-“

“That’s enough.” The mayor snapped. “All of you are spinning this out of control. We do not want paranoia and hatred to consume our village. We’ll pull through this.”

Tubbo snorted. “Says the murderer.” He whispered under his breath. He glanced back at the cabin he was staying in, remembering slamming doors and a race through the night.

“We’ve come up with a few measures for how to handle an outbreak.” Cornelius said, averting his eyes. “We’ll finish setting it up this evening.”

“A gallows.” Catboy mumbled. Tubbo let out a slow breath, trying to control the nervousness rising in him. This time, he’d get it right. He was almost to the end of the first day. Just a bit longer, and he could finish up his plan for night two.

“It’ll be fine.” Cornelius assured. It took everything Tubbo had not to burst out in hysterical laughter. “I’m certain that we will work this out without anyone getting killed.”

By the end of this, about half of the town would be dead. And it would all end with Cornelius. Tubbo frowned, watching how Catboy was staring at Cornelius.

Maybe this time he could assist a bit. The beginnings of a plan formed in his head, a way to help without Karl stopping him.

The mayor coughed as if he could dispel the tense atmosphere. “We’ll finish putting it together tonight. I know one of us had investigator training and there is also a doctor in this village who could assist if someone is injured.”

Tubbo scrunched his face. Uh. That was definitely wrong. Everyone thought he was the doctor last time and the closest he got to assisting with injuries was to escape getting stabbed himself.

If he didn’t do anything, then what was the doctor supposed to do? They seemed like the worst doctor in the world to him.

If you had asked him at the beginning of the last loop, he would have thought they were just humoring him. Haha, look at the orphan who says he's a doctor! Let's just visit the actual doctor and let him play his games.

And yet. That one lie had kept him 'safe' from the lynching. And yet, they had given absolute trust to Catboy when he said he was the investigator.

"As if anyone will survive." Tubbo heard from behind him. This time, he was more prepared, spinning around as they began to speak. This time, he got them just before they could finish. It was another villager, one he didn't remember the name of. They had been proven innocent in the final round of the past game.

They looked back at him with flat, dead eyes. Tubbo shivered and looked away. If it wasn't for what he knew, he would have sworn they would be the killer. There was just something fundamentally off about them. Not in the inhumanity of Fae, but looking in his eyes, he couldn't see a single spark of life.

And he could almost swear that someone was watching him now. But whenever he looked around, everyone was focused on the mayor.

By the time the announcements had ended, his nerves had been frayed to their limit. It took everything he had not to push Catboy away when the other nudged him back to the present. Catboy wouldn't deserve that. He had been kind to him in the last round and confirmed not to be the killer.

Or maybe, Tubbo thought, he was just feeling guilty after watching the other sob his heart out. This was why he preferred to talk only to Tommy. Talking to Tommy had been easy, comfortable, they had adjusted to each other after years of living together.

"You doing alright?" Catboy said. Cornelius loomed over his shoulder, a look of faux concern plastered on his face. "You don't look so good."

"Yeah, it's just—" Tubbo sighed. Even after sleeping, he still didn't feel better. It was almost like being in the Veil was draining him of his energy, making him tired and sluggish. He wouldn't be surprised if it was happening because one of the Fey he had met had wished it to. "It's a lot, you know?"

A lie, but Catboy nodded sympathetically. For being the investigator, he was almost comically easy too fool. Or maybe he was used to the Fey who always seemed to see past his guard. "I'm sure it's just a false alarm." He said. "A few nights of being on guard and we'll be back to normal."

Cornelius looked less certain. "Even if there are, we'll find them." He said. A pause, one far too long to be comforting. "There's no way they can stay hidden for long."

He'd laugh in his face if he wasn't certain he'd get killed on his first night. "Maybe I'm the killer and that's not comforting at all." He said. Might as well start laying the stage now."

Catboy inhaled quickly, shaking his head. “You shouldn’t say that.” He murmured, his knuckles white from how hard they were holding the cane. “I’m sure you’ll be safe. It’s- Its unlikely for you to be infected.”

“But not impossible.” Tubbo whispered, glancing at the gallows and shuddering. He wasn’t looking forward to that at all.

He just had to get voted out. Then, he’d not only win, but he’d keep the letter. If Sapnap was any indication, he could use it to bargain for Karl’s help or to distract him. And considering how easily Karl had defeated him, he was pretty certain he’d need it.

“Go to bed.” Cornelius said. Tubbo nearly flinched as a hand ruffled through his curls, quick as a blink. “Don’t drive yourself crazy wondering about what-ifs.”

Tubbo raised his hand to his hair before dropping again. It was nice having people ruffle his hair but also... not as nice. Cornelius’ hands were a bit too cold, quick and rough, not soft and gentle. It sickened him how what once was a nice gesture now felt lacking.

He didn’t miss them. He didn’t miss how Schlatt had ruffled his hair or the way Dream had fought him as if it was nothing more than a fun game. Even how Karl had carried him like he was a precious treasure. He didn’t miss any of it. Barely remembered it, in fact.

He’d be more concerned about the fact that the person ruffling his hair was a murderer, but that seemed to be a common theme nowadays.

“He’s right.” Catboy said. “Like I said, it could just be a false alarm.”

“Alright then.” Tubbo said, shaking his head. There wasn’t much point to him staying out any longer. But still, his feet refused to move as he watched Cornelius walk away towards the construction zone.

“Everything alright?” Catboy prompted. Tubbo glanced back at him, his hands fidgeting with the bandanna tied around his neck. “Are you still nervous?”

“You should keep an eye on Cornelius.” Tubbo blurted out. He flushed in embarrassment. “Just in case something happens.”

If Catboy investigates Cornelius earlier, the murders may be solved before they got too far. It would break Catboy’s heart but hopefully, he wouldn’t be alive when it got that far.

It was the only clue he could give them and it would have to be enough. History may not be malleable but maybe one little pebble thrown in a pond could make a difference.

Catboy smiled. “I think Cornelius can handle himself. But I’ll keep an eye on him.” He said. “Don’t worry about us. We’ll make it through this together.”

“Stay safe.” Tubbo said. Catboy dipped his head but didn’t turn to follow him as he walked away. Tubbo trudged through the town square, towards the rickety cabin that had become a sort of home base for him.

Not home, it could never be home. But it was safe enough and he couldn't exactly leave it.

Tubbo lingered on the doorstep, eyeing the dead grass along the side of the house. A garden would have been nice there. It wasn't quite the right weather for it, but he craved the feeling of dirt in his hands, the mindless work of digging and planting and weeding.

He'd just have to garden even more when he escaped. Tubbo pushed open the door, relaxing a bit when he stepped inside.

It was still plain and boring. The door refused to lock right when he pushed it shut, the lock refusing to answer to his attempts. Tubbo gave up with a growl. If he had some tools with him, he could create a better lock. But it was just as likely that the magic of this town would destroy any attempts.

He huffed, walking over to the window. Outside, he could see the gallows slowly taking shape. Catboy was still watching, his figure silhouetted by the setting sun.

What had caused this change? Was it the words he had spoken to him at the end or the words he hadn't spoken during the meeting? Tubbo chewed on his bottom lip, turning the possibilities over and over in his head.

Would there be consequences for his meddling?

He shook his head. There was no prize for lingering in fear. "Tommy would have hated this place." Tubbo mumbled. Puzzles would be left unfinished at the orphanage and the one time they had tried to play detective, Tommy had gotten bored halfway through.

Standing here now, he had to admit the feeling of boredom was spot on. "Never knew I'd want to get murdered." Tubbo mumbled, pressing his forehead against the glass. As loathsome as the idea was, the wait was agonizing.

He knew it was coming now. Any moment now, the crew would split off into their own houses. After that, the outside world would go pitch black and the murderers would strike.

Until then, he was bored.

Until he saw something outside, making him stand up a bit straighter, his brow creasing in thought. "Is he..." Tubbo said, his fingertips resting against the glass.

As the last few villagers split off to their houses, he could see Catboy and Cornelius walking together towards Cornelius' house. Tubbo watched, waiting for Catboy to walk away.

But he didn't. Instead, he and Cornelius walked inside together.

"That absolute moron." Tubbo snarled, running a hand through his hair. How could he have misinterpreted his words so badly? He dove for the door, scrambling to open it.

The click of the lock. The last rays of the sun died.

“No!” Tubbo snapped, slamming his fists against the door. It didn’t budge, mocking him with its sudden sturdiness. He growled, resting his head against the door. There was nothing he could do but wait. If Cornelius killed Catboy, he’d drag him to the gallows if he had to.

He wasn’t quite sure if he slept that night. He stayed by the door the entire time, settling into a hazy not quite sleep doze. Sometimes, he thought of the gallows. He could almost feel Catboy’s tears soaking into his shoulder. Any time he got too far into his doze, he pinched himself viciously.

One vulnerable night was quite enough.

The light breaking into the room brought him alive again and he uncurled from the cramped position he had settled on. Every muscle aches and he curses his sense of drama.

Tubbo pushed the now flimsy door open, wincing as the sunlight tried to burn out his eyes. It takes him a couple of tries but finally, he can see again. His eyes settled on the gallows and he freezes.

Because there’s Catboy. Alive and well, and *standing on the gallows platform*.

Tubbo broke into a sprint. “What the fuck are you doing!” He screams, throwing himself at the platform. Someone had to get him down from there! He could get hurt!

Arms wrapped around him, dragging him away. Tubbo howls, thrashing and smacking at everyone he can see. What the fuck was going on here?

“Cornelius died while in the same house as him.” The mayor said, coughing a bit. “The circumstances are highly suspicious.”

“He would never.” Tubbo snarls, looking up at Catboy. The man didn’t look back at him, staring at his hands sightlessly. They were smeared with red but it didn’t look quite right. As if he had tried to check for a heartbeat, not stabbed him. “He would never.”

Part of him whispered that if Cornelius died, maybe the murderers had changed. Maybe it was Catboy. He smothered that voice ruthlessly. There was no way Catboy could have done it.

“I didn’t see anything.” Catboy whispered. Every word was strangled as if he had to drag them out. “He was screaming but I couldn’t see them. And then he stopped.”

“It could be the kid.” The woman said. She shrugged under the gaze of the crowd. “I’m just saying, he seems kind of fake to me. I know how to fake cry.”

Tubbo let out a wheezy sob, trying to bite the person holding him. He’ll show her fake crying. He was going to fake cry at her grave.

“Tubbo?” Catboy said. Unerringly, his blind eyes found him. Tubbo froze under his gaze, praying to any god out there that Catboy would take this chance to save himself. Better him on the gallows than Catboy.

Catboy shook his head. "I would be more likely to be the killer."

Tubbo howled, a heart wrenching sound as he redoubled his efforts. He babbled excuses, theories, but they would let go of him why were they letting go of him why was Catboy just standing there and letting them kill him why-

"Karl!" Tubbo screamed, hot tears rushing down his cheeks. "Karl, please!"

Catboy's eyes met his. "It'll be alright. You're going to be okay."

A drop. A snap.

And Tubbo knew he was never going to be okay.

Chapter End Notes

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Black dahlias, which are actually dark burgundy, convey negative meanings compared to the other shades. Since they have the strongest hue of all dahlias, they often symbolize betrayal, sadness, and other negative emotions.

Roses

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: Mention of hanging, disassociation

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“It’s done.” The person behind him said, releasing him. Tubbo felt himself drop to his knees like a puppet that had lost his strings. He stared at the ground, noting the dirt trampled down by meetings, any grass cleared out.

“We should all settle in for a long night’s rest. The events of this afternoon have been... trying.” Tubbo scoffed. If he had the energy to stand, he’d show them trying.

He wished he was the murderer. If he was the murderer, he’d wipe them all out right here. Get the vengeance that Cornelius and Catboy deserved.

Catboy would have never killed Cornelius. He had only known him for a few days and he knew it. If... If Catboy had killed Cornelius, he would have thrown him under the bus. He had seen the guilt in Catboy’s eyes, the way they had nearly spoken up but went silent instead.

They should have done it. Not because he wanted to win, but because Catboy didn’t deserve to die. They had been kind to him, looked out for him during meetings.

And now they were gone.

For a moment, he contemplated losing. Selfishly, he wanted to see the others again. Wanted to hear Catboy’s soft greeting, see Cornelius’ careful contemplation. His heart twisted, forced to the edge of snapping.

He couldn’t. He couldn’t stay here, not if there was a chance of winning.

But he wanted to.

A hand rested on his back. From anyone else, it’d be comforting, reassurance and sympathy. His skin felt like it was boiling at the touch, flames leaping higher and higher until he wasn’t sure how the other wasn’t getting burned. “You’re out of bounds again.” Karl said. “You can’t keep doing this.”

“Fuck off!” Tubbo snapped, pushing himself up and taking a clumsy swing at Karl’s head. He just wanted the other to feel the pain he was feeling, the hurt that was eating him from the inside out.

His hand was caught and Tubbo made a wheezing sound as he was pushed back down into the ground. A steady ache radiated through his back from how he had twisted. Karl narrowed his eyes, one hand holding Tubbo's and the other hand pressed to his collarbone.

"Don't try to hit me." He said. Tubbo gasped as Karl's hold tightened, making his bones grind together. He whined, trying to squirm away. "Or next time, I'll trap you in stasis with your mind awake. Two or three days with nothing but your thoughts should teach you better manners."

"You can't." Tubbo said, gasping at the pain. That sounded worse than torture. He had spent far too long running from his thoughts to stop. "That's not part of the deal--"

"I gave you that deal in good faith. That you would not try to honking attack me. But if you want to make trouble, then I will take measures to make sure you learn better." Karl said. His once soft smile was as sharp as a knife as he leaned in. The air was so thick with the smell of roses that he felt like he was choking on it. "Isn't that nice of me? I could do far worse."

Tubbo glared. He wasn't going to congratulate the other on not torturing him. That was a pretty low bar to hit.

"You should apologize." Karl said. He pressed down a bit harder, making him wheeze and squirm. "I'll even be nice and not make it a debt to repay. Just one apology and I'll let you go."

"Fuck you," Tubbo snarled. He wheezed as he was pushed further into the ground. His collarbone made an odd popping sound.

"Not the right words." Karl cooed. "Come on, just one apology. That's all you have to do."

"I'm sorry." Tubbo said through gritted teeth. The words tasted foul in his mouth and he spat them out as quickly as possible. They made him sick.

Maybe, if he was as brave as Tommy, he would have held onto those words. Fought his way out, or bargained, or even let his bones be broken rather than apologize to Karl. Karl who had deserved what he had done. But he wasn't brave. He was practical. And practicality was telling him that his ribs were about to be crushed like a bundle of dry twigs.

"Much better." Karl said, pulling away. Tubbo greedily gulped in air, moving so he wasn't awkwardly twisted anymore. "You alright? Is anything hurting?"

"Why would I tell you? You're the one who caused it." Tubbo said, pushing himself into a sitting position. If he nearly head butted Karl before the Fae quickly pulled away, then all the better. "Why can't you just leave me alone? I was going to go into the house eventually. I just needed time."

"Of course you needed me." Karl said with a sly smile. Tubbo groaned. That was a tiny loophole and they both knew it. "And I was worried about you. You seemed awfully broken up about that mortal's death."

He prodded Tubbo's shoulder and it took every fiber of his patience not to sway his hand away. "That's the first time I've seen a person collapse like that. Usually they just cry or scream. Is that normal?"

"It's called grieving." Tubbo snapped. He'd cry but he'd cried so much during this journey that he wasn't sure he had tears left to cry. There was something empty deep inside of him, something that hurt to think about. If the place where his tears had come from had dried up forever.

He never thought that he would miss crying.

"Weird." Karl said, propping his chin up with one hand.

"Don't Fae grieve?" Tubbo said, a bit of his anger giving way to curiosity. Schlatt, Philza, and Dream had talked about immortality. He never really thought about what that meant for something as simple as grieving.

"Not really? The Fey are deathless creatures. Centuries go by in a blink. What does it matter that something is lost when soon it will be centuries without it? I suppose we can find it annoying sometimes, to not have something around anymore, but that's that." Karl said. He shrugged. "Doesn't that sound nice? To never have to grieve?"

"But don't Fey get attached to humans?" Tubbo said. He had heard stories about that happening. Was living one of those stories right now. "What happens when they die?"

"Eh, mortals disappear in a blink. You pop back into the Veil for a dance or two and suddenly their great grandchild is going on and on about the tragedy of life." Karl said. Tubbo leaned back as Karl leaned forward. The Fae scoffed, one hand pulling him into Karl's arms. It was a sickeningly familiar position. "If we really love someone, we make them Fey too so they'll never have to go. So, no, we don't really grieve."

"That's sad. And horrifying. Both I guess." Tubbo said. He wriggled out of Karl's arms with a grimace, flopping back on the ground. He stared up at the sky. "Sarrifying. Sadrrifying?"

"I like sarrifying. Rolls off the tongue better." Karl said. He flopped down next to Tubbo, staring up at the sky. "And I don't really see why. How is it sad when you know you can never lose someone? How is it horrifying to look away for a while and realize someone is already gone? Humans fall out of touch all the time and nobody blames them for it."

"I guess that's true." Tubbo said. Every adoption day at the orphanage, he waited with bated breath as prospective parents watched the kids. His heart would beat faster every time one came close, worried that this would be the day Tommy or him would get taken away, never to see each other again.

Most orphanage kids never came back after they were adopted. Losing contact was normal, common.

But it just... felt different from how Karl described it. Wrong. He would have mourned losing touch with Tommy and tried everything to find him. Karl described it as a minor

accident that was glossed over and forgotten. Like, oh whoops, forgot to get groceries at the store. Also my best friend is now dead. Haha, do I want carrots or potatoes?

But would Karl understand it if he tried to explain that?

“But what if they don’t want to be Fey?” Tubbo pointed out. He knew Tommy wouldn’t want to be Fey. Not with how they were doing it. How many people had gotten stolen away with no one to rescue them? No one to brave the Courts and bargain with the Fey for even just a tiny chance at freedom for a friend?

“Everyone wants to be a Fey. People don’t like to acknowledge that part but it’s there. You like stories, don’t you? In every story, people wish to be rich, beautiful, powerful, ageless, the list goes on and on.” Karl pulled out his book, brushing a hand over it. “And isn’t that what a Fey is?”

“Have you never wished that your best friend couldn’t be hurt? Haven’t you ever mourned that thought that one day, you would be separated in death?”

And the worst part was that he had. Through aching nights with too little food, he had been terrified at the thought that hunger or cold would tear Tommy away from him. It was an intimate fear, woven into his bones, always working away in the back of his mind.

But he would never force eternal life on Tommy to console his own fears.

“But that’s what makes life worth it.” Tubbo said, shaking his head. He brushed his hair out of his eyes, watching the stars flicker. “I cherish every moment with Tommy because I know one day I’ll lose him. I’ll never forget Catboy or Cornelius because they were taken from me far too soon. Losing that memory would mean losing them.”

The cabin in the woods wouldn’t exist without Tommy. Honey would be less sweet on his tongue without the memory of him and Tommy swiping drops of honey from the matron’s jar in the kitchen. Flowers a little less beautiful, life a little less bright. Even if Tommy was taken from him, the memories would never truly leave. Every memory was carefully tucked away in his mind, engraved in who he was.

Becoming a Fey would mean losing that. Memories would fade and new ones overcasted with the immortal life. How long until honey lost its sweetness? How long until flowers became meaningless decorations instead of symbols of happy afternoons spent playing in the meadow? He and Tommy may be mortal, but he would wager that they had lived life more than any Fey had.

“And you know that don’t you?” He whispered, looking at Karl. “You’re sad sometimes and you don’t know why. You search for something you will never find.”

Karl glanced away, his eyes hidden in shadow. His grip had tightened on the book. “You don’t have to lose Catboy and Cornelius.” He said.

“I can’t exactly make others Fey and nor would I want to.” Tubbo pointed out. It would be cruel for him to force that life upon them, especially as he didn’t want it himself.

“No. All you have to do is lose and restart the loop. You’re a smart kid, you know who the killers are. Get them voted out or get yourself killed, either way, it’ll be done. You’ve played this game well. If you restart, you could save them. Give them a happy ending before you go.” Karl said. He sat up, paging through his book.

Tubbo inhaled sharply. The idea of it was alluring. Now that he knew roles could change, he could save them. Just a few loops and he was certain one plan would end in success. Catboy and Cornelius would live happily ever after, the killers gone. No need to grieve.

It wouldn’t erase the grief in his heart but it would be a start.

“Why are you telling me this?” He asked warily. It was awfully kind of Karl to do so. Far too kind.

“I told you, I like watching these events. You’ve made my book more interesting than it has been in years. I don’t know if you’ll win this loop but I think you’ll get close. Even getting close deserves a bit of a reward, don’t ya think?” Karl said. He stopped paging through the book. Tubbo could see the dart of his eyes as they skimmed the page. “I thought you said Fey are selfish. Why is it so honking weird that I don’t want my entertainment to leave?”

Tubbo closed his eyes for a moment, thinking about it. Looking over the last few days, he was pretty certain that he could do it. He knew how the game worked now. As long as neither was the killer, it would be easy.

But something about it bugged him. It squirmed and squirmed, always just out of reach. Karl’s reason sounded honest, and the deal he had made was pretty secure. So why was he so nervous?

He pressed a hand over his eyes, ignoring Karl’s whispered reassurances. If he didn’t do it, he’d never see Catboy and Cornelius again. Everytime he thought about Catboy, all he could see was the look in his eyes as he stood up on the gallows and whispered his name-

Wait.

“You’re lying.” Tubbo said. He moved his hand away, opening his eyes and sitting up so he could look at Karl. “You’re lying to me.”

“Why would you say that?” Karl said, tilting his head and looking so honestly hurt that he nearly took the words back. Curse his soft heart. “I was trying to be kind. You don’t have to be accusatory, man.”

“This isn’t real.” Tubbo said, gesturing at this village. “I’m not just talking about the village but this entire game. It’s not real.”

Karl slowly surveyed the village before glancing back at Tubbo. “Looks plenty real to me.” He said. “Maybe you should head back to your house. I think I’ve stretched the rules enough for you.”

“He called me by my name before he died. Not Robin, Tubbo.” Tubbo pushed on, ignoring Karl’s words. “And Cornelius did too, didn’t he? But they shouldn’t know my name, as far as they know, I’m Robin. History shouldn’t work like that.”

“I think I know better how history works than you.” Karl said. The softness had slipped away, replaced with something cold and alien. Something that saw ripping innocent people away from their homes and throwing them into deadly situations as great fun.

“But you’re not saying I’m wrong.” Tubbo said. “Who are these people? And what is this place?”

“I don’t see.” Karl said slowly as if measuring every word, “Why I should tell you that.”

Tubbo scowled. Looking back, he felt like an absolute moron. It had been clear from the second day that something wasn’t right with this place. He had written most of it off as the game organizer causing chaos but it didn’t click right. None of it did.

He wasn’t a doctor. Catboy wasn’t an investigator. The mayor wasn’t the same as last time. And when that started, where should the train of thought end? Were the killers really the killers?

“This isn’t a historical event at all, is it?” Tubbo said. He had thought it weird that he had never heard of this town’s story. “It’s one of your game areas. The ones from The Beast stories. You built a game and found people to play. Maybe you stole them or maybe you tricked them the same way you tricked me. But it’s just a game.”

“Not the same way as you.” Karl said with a shrug. He grinned, something soft and sweet and utterly alien on his face. “They were less careful in their deals, more selfish. Their debts were quite a bit more than yours.”

He leaned in close and Tubbo had to cover his mouth to block out the scent of roses, so strong that he reflexively brushed a hand through his hair to check for new flowers. “That Catboy you care about? His debt alone will take decades to pay off. Cornelius, oh Cornelius. You don’t want to know the debt he’s racked up.”

“You’re lying.” And Karl laughs because they both know that’s a silly thing to say. The Fey can’t lie. They can sidestep, twist, and cheat all they want, but they can’t lie.

“Do you still want to save them?” Karl pressed on. His swirling eyes shone through the shadows, casting his face in an eerie light. “When they can’t even save themselves? When they backstab and kill to shave off a few minutes from a debt they caused? When Cornelius would have killed you just to get a bit closer to freedom?”

“How did they know me?” Tubbo asked, his voice shaking slightly. “They- everyone should see me as Robin.”

Karl waved a hand. “That’s paid information.” He said. Tubbo bit down the question. He wouldn’t be getting an answer, not without having to trade the letter or go into debt. “But do you think Catboy and Cornelius would have cared for you if they knew who you were? That

you weren't Robin, but a tricky boy who was fulfilling his deal and then hanging them out to dry?"

He sighed, rubbing at his forehead. The game had looked so simple before, laid out so neatly. But that's how it got you, wasn't it? Nothing in the Veil was as it appeared. The game that should have been a simple game of lies and death was something far more complex.

Who had Robin been? Was he a character made up for him to perform, a costume to slip on so the play ran smoothly? Or was he another person who had made a deal with the Fey? Did he dance the night away in a Faerie ring or get stolen from his cradle? He stared at his hands, but no matter how hard he looked, they were his hands.

"I'm not Robin." He said, balling his hands up and resting them in his lap. He pushed ahead before Karl could interrupt, "So, no I don't know if they would love me. I also don't know if Robin wanted to save them or why they're here or if they even existed."

"I'm Tubbo." He said, quieter. "And from the very beginning, I took this deal so I could complete my quest. To save Tommy."

This wasn't his town. The villagers weren't his friends. Delicately, Tubbo held each memory in his mind and placed them in a special place in his heart. He would never forget them. One day, when he's ready, he'll pull out the hot cocoa supplies, bundle under the blankets with Tommy, and whisper the full story. He'll talk about Catboy's kindness and Cornelius' trying to keep the town together with blood on his hands. It will not be a gentle story and he knows they will both cry by the end. But he'll remember it anyway.

Maybe one day, they'll pay off their debt, and he'll see them again. Passing through the village market or a tale of bloody mayhem whispered from a traveler. And he'll think of these days and hope they'll come out okay.

But he wasn't going to burn everything he worked for to save them.

And maybe that made him a bad person. Maybe that made him as terrible as Karl who had set up this horrible game. A person with a heart as cold and cruel as the royals of the Winter Court. But he thinks he's okay with being the bad guy if it means saving Tommy.

Tubbo stands, brushing the dirt off his pants. "I'm going to go back to the house." He said with a calmness he doesn't truly feel. "This conversation is technically against the rules of the game and I have a long day tomorrow."

He can feel Karl's eyes on his back until he finally closes the door behind him. It clicks shut, already locked. And for once, he's strangely okay with that. He knows his place in this story. The ending was coming, whether Karl wanted it to or not. He curls up in the bed, closes his eyes, and thinks of better days.

He's silent when they drag him out of the house in the morning.

They shake him, scream in his face of crimes he doesn't know of. Accusals are thrown around like lightning.

A gentle hand lands on his shoulder and Tubbo looks up. “Catboy wouldn’t want you to give up like this.” The woman said. The disbelieving tilt to her expression tells a different story. “Do you have any defense?”

“Jimmy was the murderer.” Tubbo said with a shake of his head, repeating a name he had barely caught the previous day. The woman reels back. Tubbo was pretty sure she was married to the mayor. He should feel bad. It was true, in halves. He was a murderer. In the past game, they had just narrowly avoided him killing them all. As to why he didn’t tell the truth? He raised his head, staring into a man who had the cold eyes of a fish.

It’d be easy to spin his plan as the logical one. After all, between the mayor and the orphan, who’s more likely to go? There was something... off about the killers this round. Unhinged in a way Cornelius and the mayor hadn’t been. He couldn’t risk putting them up at the gallows and people catching on.

It would be a nice and tidy logical plan. And a complete lie.

He was still a bit mad about them killing Catboy. He’s earned a little chaos.

He’s unsurprised to find himself dragged up to the gallows. As they slip the rope over his neck, he looks past the crowd, towards the woods. Karl’s eyes meet his. Tubbo smiles, ignoring the last volley of apologiesaccusationspleasarguments from the villagers.

Catboy wouldn’t cry for him after all. The dead could shed no tears. Maybe they’ll remember him, in brief snatches of conversations and deja vu. Maybe they’ll mourn for the boy who appeared and disappeared like a ghost. He knows he will mourn for them.

“Any last words?” The mayor asks. His brow was stained with sweat and he refused to look at at Tubbo.

“I win.” Tubbo said. He looked at the crowd, really looked, and for a moment, he saw through the glamour of the game.

Saw the exhausted people, their haggard faces and bloodstained clothes. He expected anger for slipping away so quickly. Hurt that he was leaving them behind to suffer. Confusion.

But none of those appear.

Helga smiles, nodding at him. Miles waves. Bob dips his head. Jack bows, flourishing like an actor waving to another to get off the stage. Faintly, he thinks he feels two hands on his shoulder, one reassuring and the other a gentle pat of congratulations. And Jimmy whispers to him before pulling the lever:

“Be free.”

Everything goes black.

The Jester has won!

Chapter End Notes

There is also an unofficial ending up on Changing of the Seasons! I will warn, this one is a lot darker than the previous ones and does have some gruesome imagery and death.

Begonias

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“If you get any closer to me, I’m going to bite you.” Tubbo threatened. He just wanted to lay on the ground and have five seconds. Just five seconds to lay in the flowers and pretend he was in one of the wildflower meadows at home. That he had been running around with Tommy, not participating in whatever twisted game that was.

He thought he’d be okay with it. That after Catboy and Cornelius were gone, his last ties would be cut. He’d forced himself to forget their names when they came up in conversations and referred to everyone with generic descriptions. Leaving shouldn’t have affected him.

But then he’d seen them. Really seen them. As the people they were, not the roles they played. And yeah, maybe some of them were messed up, but he was pretty messed up too. He wanted to be surprised and disappointed in himself for grieving his departure but he couldn’t be.

Tommy was right, he was pretty soft.

There was a soft sigh, the rustle of pages. “I admit, I wasn’t expecting you to go through with that.” Karl said. Tubbo snorted.

“Aren’t you supposed to deal with time? Not that I’m expecting an answer, I don’t want to pay that again.” He asked. He’d be quite happy if he went the rest of his life without ever seeing the village again. “It just seems unlikely that you didn’t already know what I would do.”

There was a soft pause. The more the silence stretched on, the more unease churned in his gut. There was no birdsong, no chirping or bussing of insects. It felt like the calm before a storm, like the quieting of a predator entering an area. Everything is holding its breath, waiting for the inevitable breaking of the silence.

Was that because the Veil didn’t have much in the way of wildlife or was it because of the Fae sitting next to him, Tubbo wondered. A few stories had described fantastical beasts: a horse like creature that ran through fire without being burned, crows that could hold conversations like a person, even a massive creature with the strength of ten oxen whose dangerous charges brought ruins upon villages across the country.

The closest to one of those would be Fundy, he thought with a snort. Though the Fae would probably kill him for saying so.

“What’s so funny?” Karl asked. Tubbo shook his head, slowly blinking open his eyes. There wasn’t a sun in the sky but the light stung all the same. He called shenanigans.

“What?”

“You laughed.” Karl said. There was a quiet shuffling as the Fae leaned over him. Tubbo tried to press himself further into the ground, hoping he’d suddenly develop the power to sink inside and disappear. Nothing happened though because he was cursed to be trailed by annoying Fey. “Why?”

“It’s a joke you wouldn’t really understand.” Tubbo said with an uneasy shrug. He didn’t really want to fully explain it in case Fundy found out and felt insulted. “I was just think about how there were no animals in the Veil and what I had seen that was close.”

Karl hummed, an odd tuneless sound that made Tubbo cringe and go to cover his ears. “Humans are hard to read.” He said. “You’re constantly drifting from one thing to the next. Always looking forward, trying to get what you want. But instead of taking the easy road, you meander. You agonize over opportunities you chose not to follow and ignore the easy path laid out to choose the one laden with pitfalls. It’s bizarre.”

“Just because something is easy doesn’t mean it’s the best.” Tubbo said. Loving Tommy hadn’t been easy. The other had snapped at everyone when he first arrived, hitting and stealing, going so far as to tear the stuffing out of the stuffed bee that had been Tubbo’s only possession.

Tubbo had punched him in the eye and then started crying. The next day, the bee had been left on his pillow, carefully restitched and refilled. Tommy’s pillow was nothing more than loose fabric. He’d cried again.

It had been a long and harsh road to get them both to their little home. But he hadn’t regretted a single second of it.

“Why shouldn’t it be?” Karl said. “If you had taken my offer, you could have saved them. You had the ability.”

“But I would have lost myself.” Tubbo said. He would have agonized over every angle, grieved dozens of times all to save himself from grieving for the rest of his life. “Would saving them be easier than grieving? Maybe. But that’s not the path I wanted. My quest is hard enough already.”

“You’re a very foolish child.” Karl said. A hand briefly ruffled his hair and Tubbo flinched. “And that’s ignoring the easiest solution of all.”

How did he always end up having this conversation? Had he been an axe murderer in another life? At least, Karl had been by far the most sedate. He still had bruises from the fight with Dream.

“We’d let you see him.” Karl whispered. Tubbo closed his eyes again, not wanting to look into the Fae’s eyes. “You don’t have to go on this terrifying journey to save your friend. We wouldn’t separate friends.”

This is the person who created that horrifying village, he reminded himself. Or who at least considered it a fun entertainment. They weren’t supposed to make him feel the same aching desire for something he had given up chasing years ago.

“But you are separating us.” Tubbo said. He felt he had to say this far too much over the past few days. “And don’t argue that it’s for our own good or that an immortal and mortal can’t be friends. We were both friends before this and we’ll be friends after. But I’m unwilling to cave to your demands on what our friendship would be like.”

Maybe, if it had been a choice to go into the Veil, if they had gone in hand and hand, he would have considered Karl’s words.

But he had seen so much. Had Tommy cruelly ripped from his side. Had been reminded of memories that had long gathered dust, had pushed himself farther than he ever had before. And now, there was only one Court between him and bringing Tommy home.

Also, a bunch of possessive Fey. But he was pretty sure if he thought about that fact for too long, he’d go mad. No Fey intervention necessary.

He pushed himself to his feet, brushing at his pants, more habit than actual need. There were no grass stains on his outfit because gods forbid the Fey get messy apparently. Karl’s soft looking purple and green jacket? Poncho? Whatever it was, not a single stain marked it. Not even a drop of blood.

It was as if instead of being a part of the world, they merely dabbled in it, tossing aside anything too messy. Kind of creepy if you asked him. He liked being clean, but there was nothing better than getting a bit muddy while playing around in a stream for instance.

“Something strike your interest? Karl said, one eyebrow quirked and wearing a goofy grin. Tubbo started. “You’re staring at me.”

“Curious.” Tubbo said with a shrug. Though all the Fey had the same odd feeling to them as if they had been ripped from a piece of artwork, they all looked so different. If it wasn’t for the shivers, he’d swear there was no way Schlatt or Dream or Karl were cut from the same cloth. Honestly, he could say the same for most of the Fey they had seen.

Next to him, with his filthy and slightly tattered clothing, he felt a little out of place. Tubbo rolled his shoulders, sighing a bit as his back popped. He was going to be feeling this adventure for weeks.

“I forgot mortals could do that.” Karl said, looking a bit grossed out. Tubbo stared him in the eyes and promptly cracked every knuckle on each hand. He had to get a bit of revenge somehow. “Alright, alright. Are you ready to go? I have a loop to view and plans to make.”

Despite the rush of eagerness, Tubbo hesitated. His mind lingered on those last few words. “Not a deal, but are those people stuck there because of a debt to you?” He asked. There had been a few loopholes in Karl’s words that had kept doubt lingering in his mind.

“Oh, yes.” Karl said, his eyes lighting up. “Why? You interested in another game?”

“Definitely not.” Tubbo said, shaking his head quickly. Karl laughed.

“I can see when you lied. You enjoyed it. Maybe you buried it or maybe you thought I caused it, but you enjoyed it. Had a little rush going when you pulled your tricks didn’t you? When you realized you could know who lived and who died, that you could control it.” Karl said, leaning forward. His eyes were wide and hungry.

“We’re not talking about that right now.” Tubbo said stiffly. Karl laughed again, shaking his head. They both knew he was lying.

There had been something... enjoyable about playing. About not having to worry for the most part about curtailing his plans. Getting a chance to test out plans he had kept in the darkest recesses in his minds, plans Tommy knew about but had never seen.

And that’s why he could never go back. He’d push too hard, ride the high of pulling gambit after gambit. Sink too deep after failing. Deals with the Fey were tricking that way. They knew how to play with emotions with the delicacy of a puppeteer.

Tubbo cleared his throat. “I want to make a deal with you.” He said. “To pay off at least part of their debts.”

“Oh, well that’s tempting.” Karl said, tilting his head to the side. “My price will be pretty high though. Even a chunk of that village’s debt is gonna carry a pretty hefty fee. But it will be a very fair price.”

Tubbo cringes a bit at the syrupy sweetness laden on that last sentence. Sickeningly, he was pretty sure he knew what the Fae would want. Why did this keep happening to him? “I’m not paying that.” He said. Reaching into his jacket, he pulled out a green and purple envelope, “I’ll be paying with this.”

Karl’s eyes caught on the envelope, the hunger intensifying. He shifted as if getting ready to lunge. “Who could that be from?” He said.

“Quackity.” Tubbo said. And maybe it was foolish to give the letter away now. Maybe he was dooming himself and Tommy by trading his fallback, just to help a village that was going through torment. But if he had walked away now, doing nothing, he would have carried that guilt for the rest of his life.

“Weren’t you told to deliver that to me?” Karl said, pursing his lips. “Quacks never gives his letters away for free.”

“He said nothing about me using them.” Tubbo said with a shrug. Maybe the Fae had known that he would and wanted to see what would happen. Or maybe they just hadn’t thought about it. Must be nice, not being the one chased by terrifying Fey.

“And what would stop me from forcing you to violate your terms?” Karl said. Tubbo forced himself to stand up straight, to not flinch as the Fae rested his chin on his hand, eyes dark. “If I don’t allow you to complete the delivery?”

“Then I burn it.” Tubbo said, tilting his chin up. “If you try to sabotage me, then I will take it down with me. And you’ll never get to see what it said.”

Karl snarled, the polite mask peeling away for a moment. It takes everything Tubbo has not to turn and bolt, his knees shaking with the effort. But he had the Fae pinned. Fey were as possessive of objects as they were of people. The moment the letter bore his name, the other would need to have it.

He was playing a very dangerous game right now. If it wasn't for the strange twisted affection the other had for him, he had no doubt he would have been torn to bloody shreds for taunting them like this. Karl's hands flexed on his book, his knuckles turning white. Tubbo stayed tense, ready to turn and bolt at a moment's notice.

"I could put you in stasis." Karl hissed. His words chimed in the air, like tortured bells. "You'd deserve it for being such a honking brat."

"I'll destroy it. I swear I will." Tubbo swore. "Are you willing to risk that just to punish me? Or will you accept my deal? The letter to pay off as much of the town's debt as possible and you're not allowed to put them further into debt."

Karl shrugged. "If they come to me, I'm not going to stop them." He hissed. "You'll need more than that."

"Fine, then you just can't force them to go into debt. If they go to you willingly, that's fine. But setting up situations so they have to make a deal with you is out." Tubbo said. He held up the letter. "For words of love? I think a chunk of debt and that requirement is a fair price."

"We'll make a Fae out of you yet." Karl said. Tubbo growled, but held his ground. He wasn't going to let his disgust force him out of this deal. "What's the point of this? You want to save your precious Catboy?"

There was something odd in his words, how he spat out the name like it was something rotten. Tubbo squinted at him in incredulous confusion. "Are you- Are you jealous of him? Because I liked him?" He boggled as Karl glanced away. "Is that why you killed him and Cornelius in that last loop?"

He had assumed that it had been an accident of the loop! Just plain bad luck. Even at his most paranoid, he thought it had been to encourage him to take Karl's deal. But no, apparently the other was jealous! Of what? The fact he had civilized conversations with them? Well, he could have had that if he wasn't such a jerk!

Tubbo groaned, burying his head in his hands. "Please tell me you weren't jealous of them." He said. This would be a whole new height of insanity. Not even Schlatt had really gotten jealous.

"Okay!" Karl shouted, clapping his hands. A violet blush had spread across his face and he wasn't looking Tubbo in the eyes. "The letter for the chunk of debt and that clause will do just fine. Hand it over and we can go to our meeting. It's soon. Don't want to be late."

"You are an actual nightmare." Tubbo deadpanned, handing over the letter. He shuddered as the sky seemed to flash between day and night again, barely keeping his feet underneath him.

It was like time had snapped and then suddenly fixed itself. Even though he knew it would affect the time he had left, it made him nervous.

“I appreciate the compliment.” Karl said, taking it. His hold was gentle and he traced his finger over the envelope with a soft grin. With more caution than Tubbo had expected, he tucked the letter away in his jacket. “Alright, let's get this show on the road!”

Karl turned away, walking further in the little orchard next to the meadow. It looked like the farms he had seen on his travels, but wilder. There wasn't any neat and orderly spacing, instead the trees grew as they liked. And when they liked. As he watched, an apple tree sprouted, put out leaves that changed to flowers that changed to apples that rotted away on the branch. It toppled over with a horrible thud, withering away to dust.

He shuddered a bit, deciding to stay close behind Karl. Getting crushed by a speedy tree was not his idea of a fun way to go.

“Finally.” Tubbo mumbled. He followed after Karl, wincing at the soreness in his legs. Exhaustion dogged his footsteps and he had to keep a close eye on his feet so he wouldn't trip and fall.

“Need a little pick me up?” Karl asked. He turned, wagging his fingers. “I'm happy to give you a little boost. You'll hardly even notice any drawbacks.”

“No thanks.” Tubbo said. Even if he wanted to make a deal for that, which he didn't, he had a sinking suspicion what ‘little boost’ Karl had in mind. “I'm doing fine.”

“Suit yourself.” Karl said with a shrug, turning back towards his path. “I definitely do not miss that part of being a human. It made it so hard to get anything done. As a Fey, I don't even have to sleep if I don't want to, though little kids need plenty of sleep still.”

Tubbo flushed a bit at the remark. It was never nice to be reminded that he was practically a baby by Fey standards. “So you do miss some things about being human?” He asked. “You said you don't miss that part. What about others?”

“A few things.” Karl said, so quietly that Tubbo had to strain to hear him over the rustling of branches. “Little things. Like going to the bakery and buying warm bread or being able to go into villages without people thinking I'm attacking or a free wish giver. Little things.”

They didn't sound little to Tubbo. Things that made you happy were never little. They were to be cherished, valued, because they made the big bad things so much less bad. Little things add up.

“If you could go back, would you change it.?” Tubbo asked. “Stay a human?”

“No.” Karl said, shaking his head. His knuckles were white on the journal he was carrying. “I wouldn't. I didn't really fit in when I was a human. If I hadn't- If I didn't do what I had done, I would have never met my friends or my lovely friends. I'd be sitting in a little house somewhere, alone. Now, I get to explore, I've fallen in love, and I have eternity with those I love. That's all I ever really wanted and it makes losing the small things worth it.”

Tubbo hummed. He didn't think he would ever really understand it but he could kind of see why. If Tommy had been a Fae when they first met... Yeah. He could see himself making that choice.

"Now, if you're done prodding into my background, we're here." Karl said, stepping aside. Tubbo raised a skeptical eyebrow. A hedge wall stretched to both sides, as far as he could see. The leaves were unnaturally green and lush. "This is unfortunately where I have to leave you. I have no appointment with the Queen and other things to attend to. If you need me, call for me and I'll come back."

"For a price, I'm guessing." Tubbo said wryly. He was pretty sure what Karl was really going to go do, read his sappy letter and moon over it. Karl flashed him a mischievous grin. "Goodbye."

He took a deep breath, bracing himself before stepping into the bush. He nearly stumbled as the branches easily gave way, bending aside as if they knew what he was doing. Tubbo caught himself, glancing up into the clearing.

His eyes locked with blood red eyes.

"Welcome, Sisyphus."

Chapter End Notes

WONDER WHO THAT IS

Snowdrops

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

His lungs seized painfully, his chest jerking as he tried desperately to breath.

He knows those eyes. Saw them every time his mind spun through plans of what to do when he got to the Winter Court. How the blood red seemed to glow against the backdrop of stars, the terrifying feeling of being hunted.

Of falling, falling and catching himself, never sure whether his arms would give out or the other would be waiting at the bottom.

“Technoblade.” Tubbo said, barely above a whisper. Louder, he continued. “Why are you here?”

He had been planning to encounter the other upon leaving the Spring Court. The Spring Court wasn’t allies with Winter. Schlatt’s message had pushed what he thought would be the boundaries he thought the unallied Courts would tolerate. It was so unlikely they’d allow a Hunt in their lands that he had only constructed a handful of plans for the possibility.

Dream? He had dozens of plans for if the other showed up. Technoblade? A handful and most centered around running.

He shifted uneasily. He couldn’t run now. He had less than two days to collect the Spring charm and bring them to the Winter Court. It was already late afternoon, after the sun rose tomorrow, he’d have until midnight to complete his quest.

Technoblade laid the book in his hands down, folding them in front of him. He looked almost deceptively gentle, the boar mask being replaced by a pair of wire rimmed glasses. It hurt to look for too long at his face, his eyes unsure if they were seeing the face of a boar, the face of a man, or something in between.

“I’m here for book club.” He said. “Normally, we hold it elsewhere but Niki kindly offered to host because she has prior plans.”

Tubbo stared at him. Book club. Yeah. Okay. The immortal royals of the Fey Courts, the ones who massacred thousands and ruled the seasons, had book clubs.

What did they even read? The book was rather nondescript, being bound in leather that had begun to crack. There was no title.

“Don’t say it like I had a choice. You complained so much when I told you that I would have to cancel that I gave in.” Niki said, tossing her hair. She beamed at Tubbo. “Good to see you!”

“Can’t tear Phil away from his castle for anything and I already know what he thinks of the book.” Technoblade mutters. “And our fourth member missed the last ten sessions, not that I’ve been keeping count.”

His red eyes flicked back to Tubbo and Tubbo had to force himself to relax. Keeling over in a faint was not a productive way to negotiate.

“Have to admit, I was not expecting you back so soon. Karl’s games can be rather intensive, I was sure you’d need at least a few more rounds. We’re not even halfway through.” Niki said, resting her chin on her hand.

“You were watching me?” Tubbo said, tilting his head to the side. It made a terrifying amount of sense, The Beast’s stories were usually depicted as a group activity. Just because he saw one, didn’t mean there weren’t others.

“Just a bit.” Niki said like it was supposed to be comforting. “Technoblade got mad because I was watching while we were discussing.”

“Book club is for talking about books.” Technoblade said. He still hadn’t moved from his spot and it was unnerving Tubbo. The other seemed so different from the Fae who had stalked him through the night. But just as dangerous.

“But it was interesting!” Niki said. “I just wanted to wrap him up and hug him. You’re cute when you sleep.”

Tubbo stared at her. “I don’t know if that’s a compliment or a threat.” He said. She grinned back at him.

“I’m only here for one thing. Other than book club.” Technoblade said. He tapped the cover of the book, his eyes fixed on Tubbo.

Tubbo didn’t move. There was pressure on his shoulders, the scent of old copper filling the air. His heart was screaming at him to bolt. But he refused.

“You’re not here to kill me.” Tubbo said with calmness he didn’t really feel. “There’s no way Niki would let you kill her prey.”

At least not before she got the chance to rough them up first.

He met Niki’s eyes, hoping they couldn’t see how his hands were shaking. “I’m here to make a deal with the Spring Queen.”

“And you’ll have it.” Niki said. His heart leapt before sinking just as fast. “Technoblade has traded me a few favors in return for having a conversation with you. Alone. We’ll strike our deal afterwards.”

“I didn’t agree to that.” Tubbo said. He didn’t want to meet with Technoblade alone. It would be so easy for an ‘accident’ to happen. He wanted to make his deal and go get Tommy.

“You’ll be fine, dear.” Niki said, her eyes soft. She stood, tucking her book under her arm. “I’ll be back before you know it.”

She pressed a kiss to his forehead as she walked by, the scent of lavender and sugar surrounding him for a moment. His hands flinched, caught between pushing her away and pulling her back, making her stay so she could protect him.

And then she pulled away and slipped through the hedges. Tubbo shuddered a bit, half angry at himself for his unconscious need. He had been dealing with far too many possessive Fey.

He looked up, meeting Technoblade’s red eyes. “Would you like to sit, Sisyphus?” Technoblade said.

Tubbo remained standing. “Why are you calling me that? That’s not my nickname.”

And he knew the other knew it. They’d have to know it by now, even if they wouldn’t use it.

“Isn’t it?” Technoblade said, tilting his head to the side. “Such an interesting story behind it. He was an old king, long before your brief time. He angered the gods, most don’t agree on the how but the common theory is that he insulted them or stole something away from the god king. They wanted to punish him, of course, but his cleverness allowed him to cheat death when it came for him. And do you know how his story ended?”

“How?” Tubbo said, the words rising unbidden to his lips. He felt like the fawn standing in front of a wolf.

“He died. The gods killed him and made his afterlife one of eternal punishment. Rolling a boulder up a hill only for it to slide back before he could reach the top, none of his clever tricks left to save him.” Technoblade said. “Appropriate, isn’t it?”

He had a good feeling that Technoblade wasn’t referring to whether the punishment suited the person’s crimes. “You haven’t killed me yet.” Tubbo said.

“Yet.”

Right, that was... charming. “Are you here to talk or to threaten me?” Tubbo asked, folding his arms. “Because I have a deal to make and honestly, I’m kind of too tired to feel terror right now. It’s been a long day.”

“Trust me, you mortals are never too tired to feel fear.” Technoblade said. Tubbo slowly exhaled, weighing how long he would survive after punching Technoblade in the face. Six seconds would not be enough to finish his quest. But... gods damnit, he was tired of the shadow the Fae had left on his quest. Even knowing that the other couldn’t attack him, his heart was still trying to beat its way out through his ribcage.

“I’m here to offer you a deal.” Technoblade said, adjusting his glasses. Tubbo’s heart stopped.

“If it doesn’t involve returning Tommy to me, I don’t want it. That’s the only thing I want from you.” Tubbo said. Something dark flashed in Technoblade’s eyes, his hands flexing as if

he wanted to wrap them around his neck.

“That won’t be happening.” He growled. “Tommy stays with us.”

“Then you don’t have anything I want.” Tubbo insisted. And Tommy wouldn’t be with them for much longer if he had anything to say about it.

“Are you sure?” Technoblade said. His voice dropped lower, enticing. “Riches, fame, recognition, you don’t want any of those? If you don’t want to be a Fey, we’ll find you a human family. Just pick a name and you can pick one out. Anything you want, just say the word.”

“It’s a pretty good deal and I’m only putting it on the table because I’m tired of having to wait for my little brother to wake up. C’mon, were you really happy with Tommy? He ran circles around you. We can make a deal and you get the human family and whatever you want, and abandon this ridiculous quest.”

“Any human?” Tubbo said, tilting his head to the side. Technoblade grinned ferally and Tubbo noted for the first time that he had tusks even when his form flickered human.

“Just pick a name, Sisyphus.” He said. “You could become a foreign prince or live in some cozy cottage somewhere. We’ll even make sure it’s perfect.”

“Okay then.” Tubbo said. He grinned back, every bit as feral. “I want Tommy Innit then.”

Technoblade’s smile dropped. “Anyone but him.” He growled. He made a deep rumbling sound, something animalistic that grated on the primal fear that sat at the back of his mind, but Tubbo refused to be cowed. Tubbo shook his head, still smiling.

“You said anyone.” He said in that sing-song tone that drove adults bonkers. His smile dropped. “I said before that Tommy is the only person I want. I just want my friend back.”

“Why?” Technoblade said. His words sounded strained like he was barely holding back from lunging. “You think we didn’t watch you? He ran circles around you. Talked over you. Why would you want him back? Thought you humans were all about getting rid of those who annoyed me.”

“Because he didn’t annoy me.” Tubbo said. And gods, it was terrifying to have it confirmed that they had been watching them, apparently close enough to see them talking and he had never noticed. Or maybe he just hadn’t wanted to notice. “Because I let him run circles around me because I was fine with it. And every time he went too far, he always came back down.”

Because there were a million things behind their relationship, things Fey watching them for a few weeks would never understand. Things he didn’t want them to understand. Things he didn’t even know if they could understand with centuries of twisted thinking.

Tommy was home. Tommy was years of arguments and slamming doors. He was flower crowns and whispered wishes in the meadow. A few weeks of admittedly creepy stalking

couldn't capture their friendship.

"I can't just replace him because Tommy isn't something that can be replaced." He'd go more into it, tell him that he wouldn't let Tommy go unless Tommy really wanted to go. Not because he was enchanted but because he wanted the family they offered. Gods only knew that Tubbo had been tempted so many times to give in. But he worried that would cause them to set up a situation to force Tommy to say it or trick him. "And if you don't understand that, then you definitely don't deserve to be his family."

He flinched back as Technoblade snarled, slamming his hand on the table. "I'd wring your throat if I could, Sisyphus." He said, voice so inhuman that he could barely make out the words. "How dare you? I should slaughter you for the insult."

"How dare you?" Tubbo snapped back. "You come in, ask me to sell you my friend, and then belittle him and me when I tell you I won't do it! And then you cry insult when I point out the truth. Try and slaughter me but I can guarantee that I've broken no rules and I've spoken only the truth. If you don't understand who Tommy is and that he can't be replaced like a toy, you don't deserve to have him."

"Of course I understand who the runt is!" Technoblade said. His eyes were so dark red that they were nearly black. "And I know that he needs to be protected, to live. But you keep smothering him and dragging him back down into the dirt."

"Says the pig." Tubbo said. He took a slight step back as Technoblade lunged before the other fell back into his chair, hands tense. He was definitely going to get his throat ripped out for that but Technoblade was planning to do that anyway. "Don't you get tired of jumping? Because you're jumping to a lot of conclusions to make yourself into the righteous person here."

"I am the one in the right." Technoblade said. Tubbo sucked in a quick breath as the other rose to their feet. "You're the one dragging Tommy down because you're too foolish and shortsighted to see what's best."

"I think." Tubbo said icily. "You should go. I'll be waiting for Niki to come back. But I'm done listening to you complain about how terrible I am for not letting you steal my friend."

"He came to us willingly. You were the one chasing him."

"He came to you enchanted! So glamourised up that he could hardly stand! It was a miracle he didn't fall off a cliff!" Tubbo said, his voice just below a scream. Tommy would have never allowed them into their room if he was in his right mind, would have cursed them all out before being so vulnerable as to fall asleep around virtual strangers.

"Before then. In the blizzard." Technoblade said. His voice was infuriatingly level. "He walked in our lands, in a storm we had created. He came to us."

"He came for a shortcut." Tubbo snarled back. "Not to find a family. We went because it was a little faster than going home and some times we did stupid things. There was no grand

design, he wasn't following some invisible thread of fate. It was coincidence that we were there during the blizzard and coincidence that we drew your interest."

This time, it was Tubbo who stepped forward. "If you took the glamour off him, I guarantee he wouldn't stay. And you know that."

"He'll understand." Tubbo snorted. Tommy absolutely would not. The other fought him on things that were common sense. There was no way he wouldn't fight the Fey on this, royalty or not.

"He'll understand because you have him glamour'd to think he does." He said blandly. "But you know that, don't you? You just don't like thinking about it because it makes the big story you're writing fall apart."

He tilted his head to the side. "You really are scared of me, huh? Because I'm close to getting him back. Because once you have to remove that glamour, you know he'll run."

"You won't get anyone close." Technoblade challenged. "You talk a big game for a mortal but you know you haven't won yet."

Tubbo took a deep breath to steady his nerves. Unfortunately, Technoblade was right there. Schlatt's warning was always on the edge of his mind. He hadn't seen any sign of the other nor Dream, but that didn't mean they weren't watching.

"I was never supposed to get past the Autumn Court, was I?" Tubbo said, the snarl slipping away to be replaced by a wry grin. Technoblade didn't flinch or react but that was honestly just as damning. "So convenient that my deadly journey tossed me right into Schlatt's way."

The more he had thought about it, the more it had made sense. Philza's smug grin he had hated so much. The other must have known that Schlatt would grow fond of him and had chosen to send him into the lion's den.

If it hadn't been for a bit of quick thinking, he would have failed and been stolen away. Quest failed immediately and a convenient gift delivering itself to another Court.

It made him sick to think about. That the other had looked at him and decided what was going to happen. Sent him off on a little journey designed to get him captured in his own twisted 'family'.

"You weren't as clever as we thought you were." Technoblade said, a bit awkward. All bloodlust and less dealings, Tubbo guessed. No less terrifying for it though. "Or else you would have taken their offer."

It made an annoying amount of sense. Tubbo wrapped his arms around himself. And he had contemplated it. What it would be like to be immortal, have a family, keep Tommy and the privileges the Fey offered.

But he would have lost himself and Tommy to his bargain.

"I'm good." Tubbo said. "And I won't be taking any offers like that."

Technoblade snorted. “We’ll see about that.” He said. “Schlatt wanted me to hurt you, you know? Offered a pretty price for it too. Nice and painful, all the good types of torture. Some I haven’t gotten to use in a while. He wants you kneeling and sobbing, covered in blood, and begging to trade him anything to make the pain stop.”

Tubbo flinched back but Technoblade kept going, poisoned words tainted the air like fog.

“Dream offered me a nice price to be a hunter. Chase you down, let you slip away just barely each time. Few cuts, here and there. Keep you so on edge you can barely think, that clever mind of yours so clouded with adrenaline that you’re reduced to the animal you are. I would have done that for a neat price but he wants to play too. That brings it up a little.” Every word so matter of fact, laying out each deal in gruesome detail.

“Unfortunately, they both want you alive.” Technoblade said with a grimace. “But it would be quite the fitting punishment. Similar to Sisyphus’ boulder, you will take on what you do hate.”

“I wouldn’t.” Tubbo said. Technoblade tilted his head and he knew that the other had caught the waver in his voice.

Because he didn’t know.

He had been staying barely one step ahead since he had gotten into the Veil. If he was forced back, lost all of the plans... he didn’t know. He didn’t know what kind of choice he’d make with his back against the wall.

But he had a pretty good idea.

It was a neat little scam he had seen being run on other street kids. Have someone beat them up a little then offer a helping hand. Usually they were so grateful to be rescued that they didn’t balk at the strings attached. It had nearly happened to him once and they had had to skip town fast after Tommy had broken the man’s jaw with a wild punch.

“Luckily for you, you got to Niki first.” Technoblade said with a shrug. “I got a bit distracted with my little brother.”

Tubbo gritted his teeth. “He’s not yours.” He said. He hated how Technoblade talked like he had won already. That even now, he couldn’t do much more than insult the other. Attacking him would break the fragile protection that his future deal with Niki had given him.

“He will be.”

“You’re a terrible person.” Tubbo said with a huff. “You’ll never realize what you’re doing is wrong, will you?”

“Why is it wrong? Because you don’t like it?” Technoblade said and Tubbo nearly puked at the self righteous tone he had. “Tommy will be a prince, he will have a family, and he will never have to feel sorrow again. If you got your head out of the dirt, you could have that too, but I honestly don’t care too much what you pick. I’ll either make a tidy profit off of sending

you to one of the Courts or ripping your guts out and leaving them at the border as a warning.”

“I’m not letting you do either of those.” Tubbo said, turning away. “And I think you’re wrong about my nickname.”

Sisyphus may have been clever but that’s all they shared. He didn’t defy the gods out of arrogance or selfishness. He didn’t venture into the Veil to gain glory through his own story. To crown himself as someone who could deal with the Fey and win. Maybe once or twice, he had daydreamed about that happening, but never had he really wanted to do it. All the cleverness in the world wasn’t worth abandoning his friend and their home.

If he had to be an old myth, he would rather be Orpheus. The man who had ventured into the Veil to rescue his wife who had been whisked away by the Fey. Who had played music so heart wrenchingly beautiful that the Fey who had stolen her had wept. Someone who walked through foreboding woods and braved dangerous monsters to lead her home.

A tale of desperation and love that had struck a chord with him when he had first heard it. The thought that someone could love someone so much that they would do something like that. He had been younger than, in the misty days before Tommy had arrived. He had shaken his head, thought that he would never do something so foolish for ‘love’.

Look at him now.

But unlike Orpheus, he didn’t plan to falter at the last moment.

“Niki.” He said. “I know you’re listening. I’m ready to make the deal. I’m done listening to him.”

Chapter End Notes

That’s why I never responded to the Orpheus comments! It’s very true that Tubbo can easily embody Orpheus’ story as well as Sisyphus. If Techno was an bystander, he might have changed the name.

But he’s not and he’s mad

Orchid

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Aw, is Technoblade being mean to you?” Tubbo nearly jumped out of his skin as an arm settled around his shoulders. “Technoblade, I didn’t want you to scare the poor guy.”

The scent of sickly sweet sugar and lavender surrounded him. Tubbo cringed under the touch, the arm feeling like a chain around his neck.

It didn’t make sense when he compared it to the past. Before, it had taken ages for the royals to start getting attached to him. Even if it took him a while to realize what was happening, he knew they hadn’t really liked him very much in the beginning.

Was this just how Niki acted?

He tried to slip out from under her arm but she moved with him, not letting him get too far away. A soft scraping sound drew his eyes back to the table. Technoblade had sat down again, his eyes crimson red again.

“He was rude to me.” He said. Tubbo glared at him. “He’s lucky that I can’t kill him for it. You’re too soft on him.”

Rude? Yeah, right. He just told the truth that Technoblade didn’t want to believe. Tubbo opened his mouth to argue but the words were awkwardly choked off as Niki gently yanked him closer to her side.

When he looked up at her, she was smiling. “I’d like you to let go of me.” Tubbo said. He didn’t dare push her away. While Technoblade was bound by his deal, Niki was not. If he hit her and she declared a blood feud, he was dead.

Or worse.

“Quiet, the adults are talking.” Niki said. She looked back at Technoblade, not even acknowledging Tubbo staring at her in disbelief. “If I hadn’t come in, you were going to kill him, weren’t you? He’s within my Court, and therefore he belongs to me.”

“I asked you to come back!” Tubbo said, spluttering in disbelief. He yelped as she tightened her grip, making the bones in his shoulder creak.

Right. This was not going to be a fun one. He wouldn’t consider himself an expert on Fae but he was pretty sure that was a bad sign. Reluctantly, he settled down to wait and listen.

He’d intervene if the conversation went on for too long. But he did not want to break his shoulder again, nor continue his quest with a broken shoulder if he couldn’t get a good enough deal to have it healed.

“Hush.” Niki said sternly.

“He’s got a mouth on him. If he’s yours, then I expect you to deal with that.” Technoblade said. Tubbo could tell he was enjoying this, it was written all over the other’s smug face.

He should have taken the opportunity to bite him. He was pretty sure it would have been fully justified and worth the consequences. Technoblade deserved a good chomp.

“All the seedlings need their time to blossom.” Niki said breezily. “The dough won’t rise right if you knead it too much.”

“You’re condoning bad habits.” Technoblade complained. Niki laughed, the sound like wind chimes in a storm gale.

“Sure I am, anarchist.” She said. Tubbo frowned, glancing at Technoblade. How could an anarchist be a prince? That didn’t make sense at all. “Unfortunately, I do think we’ll need to suspend the book club for now. I have other matters to attend to.”

“Heh?” Technoblade said. He tapped the book. “Are you really going to bail on the book club?”

“Get Phil to talk to you.” Niki said. Tubbo flinched back as her free hand reached around to ruffle his hair, her hand lingering on the flower crown.

“I already know what he thinks about it.” Technoblade grumbles. “He’s read it three times through and has practically recited it to me while we’re waiting. And I can’t go to Lethe because they disappeared and I don’t have time to search for them. I barely wanted to come this far as it was, the runt shouldn’t be left alone.”

Tubbo made a strangled hiss at the nickname, glaring at Technoblade. “Don’t you talk about him.” He said. Technoblade snorted, looking away from him.

“Ask Wilbur?”

Were they just going to ignore him the entire time? Why did he have to be here? Couldn’t he go sit outside while they finished whatever conversation this was?

“If he hates it, we’ll dance around the subject for the next eternity. If he likes it, I’ll have to hear him quoting it for the next eternity. And that’s if I can drag him away from his room decorating.” Technoblade said as he stood, shaking his head. “There’s no winning.”

“That’s truly terrible.” No it wasn’t. Terrible would have been if he had gotten his dream of biting him. Then they’d know what terrible was. “I’ll send a letter by later.”

Scratch that, Tubbo said as he rolled his eyes, terrible was having to listen to this conversation. If he thought it had use, he’d be delighted. But it was so clear how they danced around anything important and Technoblade was outright taunting him at this point.

“But I’ll have to ask you to go now.” Niki said. Tubbo perked up a little. Was he finally able to strike his deal? “Aw, look at him, so excited!”

Tubbo stared at her fingers and tried very hard not to think about how they were in biting range. He had stopped biting people. He was Mature now.

Technoblade rolled his eyes and Tubbo immediately felt disgusted at the thought that they were finally on the same page. “Fine, make your deal.” He glanced at Tubbo. “You better lose this time. Or I’ll be seeing you later.”

“You’ll be seeing me when you lose.” Tubbo snapped back. He gasped in a breath as Niki squeezed again.

He subsided with a scowl, watching as Technoblade picked up his book and slipped between the bush. The branches parted ways for him, quickly entangling again after to hide any sight of the outside world.

He was well and truly trapped now.

Niki squeezed his shoulder. “Is that better? Technoblade can be nice but not when he’s in such an awful mood. I’m sorry you had to see that.” She didn’t look very sorry. There was a smug tilt to her grin that made his stomach curdle and he had to fight to keep his expression neutral.

“It was nothing more than I expected. Now, I’d prefer if you would let go of me.” Tubbo said, trying to pull away. “I’d rather not conduct our deal like this.”

“Why not?” Niki cooed. He flinched as her free hand trailed over the crown again. This was the second time she had embossed with it. Did it mean something? He couldn’t remember anything related to flower crowns and the Spring Court but his collection of stories related to the Spring Court was rather sparse.

For all he knew, it was a huge signboard above his head saying ‘free kid adopt here’!

“Because I don’t want to.” Tubbo complained. He shuddered a bit at Niki’s smirk. Normally, he’d hide this, try to make himself seem more mature like he did before. But here, maybe it would help him. But it would be a dangerous game, he knew, recalling Technoblade’s words. “Let me go now.”

“Fine.” Niki said, pursing her lips. “You really should eat more, you’re awfully skinny.”

She clapped her hands and Tubbo jerked as a plate appeared on the table, laden with still steaming pastries. Some, he recognized from shop windows or rare treats, like cupcakes decorated in colorful icing in careful swirls or the decadent looking brownies, chocolate sauce oozing over the top. Perfectly brown chocolate chip cookies shared their spot with cinnamon covered pumpkin pie.

And others, he didn’t recognize at all. One looked like an apple, its golden skin shimmering with a bright purple hue. Another was some sort of fruit pie, but the fruit was dark purple in color, strange particles floating off the surface. Then there was the perfectly round cake, its top covered in uniform white icing with perfectly circular red spots.

The plate didn't look big enough to hold them all and yet somehow, they all stayed on there, laid out in a most tempting feast. Tubbo took a deep breath, his stomach rumbling at the smell. He hadn't eaten in days and even though it wasn't necessary in the Veil, that didn't mean he didn't feel like he was starving.

"Have as much as you want." Niki said, beaming. "I made them all myself!"

Tubbo swallowed hard, forcing himself to stay in his spot. It had been so easy to ignore the urge before back in the Autumn Courts. Dryness had plagued his mouth then when he saw the cup of Fey wine but he could reign it in. But now, he felt like his stomach was twisting inside out, desperate for food. The honey had barely whetted his appetite and even now, he could taste the sugary sweetness in his mouth.

He had gone longer without food when he was younger but he and Tommy had worked hard to make sure they always had something to eat. It had gotten easier once they had grown enough to pick up odd jobs and easier still since they found the cabin and made a garden. Now, he wasn't quite as good at ignoring it as he would have been years ago.

"You're a baker?" He said. Next he'd find out that Schlatt was the priest at a local church. Most stories hadn't really talked about Fey having hobbies that weren't maiming people or twisting deals for their own entertainment.

"Yes. Odd, isn't it? I picked up the habit, oh a few centuries ago, and have stuck with it ever since. I doubt any human baker can compare by now." She said. She picked up a cookie, examining with delight. "Have as much as you would like, I can always make more."

"I appreciate the gesture, but I'm good." Tubbo said. He reddened a bit as his stomach rumbled again.

"I think somebody disagrees with that." Niki said, hand raised to cover her smile. "Are you sure? There's plenty here, all fresh from my morning baking session."

"I'm not going to fall for that trick." Tubbo said bluntly. "I'm sure it will taste delicious but I'm also sure that a single bite will trap me into the Veil until I fulfil whatever debt it places upon me which will likely be so large that my stay might as well be called forever."

Just paying for that tiny taste of honey had been enough. Before, he could have negotiated Karl's price down to a story or two like with Punz. After tasting the honey, he had to go through the village loop to pay for the honey and the guidance. With all the sweets on the plate, he couldn't even calculate how much it would cost him.

"Worth a try." Niki said, setting the cookie back down. The plate vanished and she took a seat, gesturing to the chair across from her. "You really do need to eat more though."

"Maybe later." Tubbo said noncommittally. As soon as he brought Tommy home, he was going to make himself a huge mug of hot chocolate and a big bowl of soup. Tommy would like that, the Winter Court was freezing cold. Hot chocolate and soup would warm them both up. "Are you ready to make our deal now?"

“So impatient. Isn’t patience a virtue with you mortals?” Niki said. She rested her chin on her hand.

“I’m kind of on a deadline.” Tubbo said, narrowing his eyes. “And you know that. So, yes, I’d like to make my deal as soon as possible. What do you want in exchange for the Spring charm?”

Niki hummed. “The Spring charm, huh?” She said, “That’ll be a pricey task. I’ll be setting a trial for you. If you win, you get the Spring charm. If you lose, I get your True Name.”

“What is with Fey and asking for that?” Tubbo mumbled. Niki laughed, her laugh like the burble of a creek.

“The Charms are expensive.” She said, “There’s a lot of magic in those. None of us would part with them for any lower.”

He wouldn’t be surprised if Philza had known that when he set the quest and had chosen the Charms for that reason. It was awfully convenient how the trap had woven itself around him. If the deal was for any less, he could have negotiated for a better place. Having to offer up his name was like offering himself up on a silver platter.

“I’ll take very good care of it.” Niki said, reading his frustration as something else. “I’ll take very good care of you.”

Well, that at least confirmed some of his thoughts about the situation. Tubbo pretended like he was thinking over the deal, eyeing Niki warily.

She didn’t actually like him, not like Schlatt and Dream had. There was interest there, but it was the interest of someone who was old and wanted a bit of entertainment. Not the dark and possessive love he had seen in Dream, Schlatt, and to a lesser extent, Karl. They had looked like they wanted to wrap him up and never let him go.

He had seen it in Technoblade too, when the Fae had spoken about Tommy. Deep down, very deep, he was glad that the Fey had been truthful when he said they cared for Tommy. Just because Fey could not lie didn’t mean they couldn’t muddle the truth. He didn’t care about their feelings but it was... nice. To know that even if he failed, Tommy would live.

Not that he planned to fail.

But Niki’s attitude changed things. He was glad she didn’t feel that way, he really was. He had enough to deal with already. It was clear she saw him more as a passing toy, maybe a small animal at best, something adorable and entertaining enough to play around with. It meant that he had less room to push and pull at their deal.

Schlatt and Dream had not wanted to kill him. Maybe in the beginning they did, but at some point, they wanted him to live. Niki was very likely not going to be the same. Toys weren’t supposed to fight back, small animals weren’t cute when they snarled and fought to escape. One misstep and she could decide to allow a Hunt in her lands.

But even if he did know what he did to make the royals like him, he wasn't going to try repeating it.

He did have one card though. Bragging rights. If she won his Name, he'd be a useful bargaining chip for the other Courts. It was a fragile peace but one he was going to use to the fullest extent.

"What would the trial be?" Tubbo said. The quaver in his voice was almost artful in his opinion, just strangled enough to sound like he was trying to hide it and failed.

"A fairly straightforward one." Niki said, leaning back in her chair. "All you need to do is make it to the border of my land before the sun rises. Any border will do, but it has to be one of my borders. That's it."

"Won't Techno be there?" Tubbo said. The best border to go for would be the border between the Winter Court and the Spring Court so he could save time on his trip back. But if he left the boundaries of the Spring Court, he forfeited the protections offered by their land. The Hunt would resume and he'd have to collect the Charm while being pursued by Techno.

Not exactly his idea of a fun time.

"As long as our deal lasts, you'll have protection from the Winter Court." Niki promised. Tubbo sat back, thinking that over. It was a hefty promise but a smart one. It would only last until he reached the border so she wouldn't cause too much conflict with Techno. "Once you reach the border, I'll give you the Charm. What happens next is up to you."

Tubbo hummed. It was still risky. While Techno couldn't attack him immediately, the other could always wait. "And if I asked for a head start?" He asked.

"I would tell you that that is going to cost a lot." Niki said, her smile dipping for a moment. "I'd have to cash in a lot of favors to control something going on outside my borders, let alone a Hunt. Years of life will be the least of the payments I would be willing to accept."

Well, there went that idea. Getting into debt this close to the end would be terrible. Even if Karl's debt hadn't taken any actual time away, he couldn't guarantee that would be the case again. But he still hated it. That what happened that night on the mountain side could happen again.

He hated how helpless he felt when he thought about it. There was no amount of negotiation that could have stopped it, he knew, but that didn't help. There was no way he could have tricked Philza into accepting a sabotage clause broad enough that Techno wouldn't attack. Every plan he had come up with ended in failure,

But still. The what if lingered.

"Is something going to be stopping me?" Tubbo said warily. Getting to the border sounded awfully easy. There were paths that would take him straight there and so far, he hadn't broken any rules serious enough to have Niki declare open season. At least, he was almost certain he hadn't broken any.

“Anyone can if they wish to.” Niki said with a shrug. “I’m not going to be mandating it or putting a price on your head. I mostly just want to see how you’ll do.”

“Can the borders move?” Tubbo said. Judging by the vicious edge to her smile, he had asked the right question. “Can you move them?”

“Yes.” She said, “I’m assuming that for our deal, you’ll want to keep it fair?” She spits out the last word like it was a curse.

“Yes.” Tubbo said. He barely remembered to duck his head a bit, not to look her in the eyes. He didn’t like playing vulnerable. “No moving the borders around. And you can’t kill or injure me during the deal.”

“Not after it?”

“You’d never agree to that.” Tubbo said with a snort. That would take a price far too high for him to pay. There was a good reason he had never tried to push for permanent protection from the other Courts.

That and he was pretty sure it would backfire heavily upon him. There were far too many ways Schlatt and Dream could have twisted that.

He leaned back in his chair. “Will I get a headstart in the beginning?” He asked. “To keep it far after all.”

“I’ll allow it.” Niki said. “So, no killing, no maiming, no stretching the borders, and you want a head start. Make it to the border before sunrise and you’ll get your Charm. Fail, and I get your Name. Agreed?”

Tubbo mulled it over. He couldn’t see anything wrong with it. That didn’t mean it was safe but any of the clauses that immediately came to mind were going to be expensive. Better to cut his losses, he was burning moonlight.

“Agreed.” For a moment, the scent of sugar and flowers intensified, so strong he swayed a little. It brought to mind wildflower fields and walking by a bakery. It would be almost soothing, if he didn’t smell old copper beneath the sugary sweetness.

He didn’t bother to say goodbye, bolting away from the table and into the bushes. They didn’t bend aside like they did for Techno. He had to fight to escape, twisting and tearing away snarling branches until he stumbled into open air.

Behind him, he could hear a laugh like windchimes and bells tolling the death knell.

Chapter End Notes

Tubbo on the run!

Holly

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The worst part was he didn't even feel surprised anymore.

Nervous, yes. While he had some experience now, that didn't change the fact that he was facing a very different Court than the ones he had gone through before. Plans had to be amended on the fly. He had to plan for variables he didn't ever know about.

But surprised? This wasn't exactly his first time. He'd crack a smile if he wasn't currently sprinting through the woods. It kind of felt a bit like the manhunt game. Maybe that was where she had gotten the idea. Maybe all the rulers got together for various club meetings.

The thought of Dream and Niki at a stitch and bitch nearly made him trip over a tree root. His sides ached. Tubbo slowed down, taking the chance to catch his breath. He wasn't sure if he'd get another chance.

First, the bad. He had no idea how long his head start was. For all he knew, Niki could have already sent people after him. Not ideal, as now he had no clue whether he was safe or not.

"Should have talked about that." Tubbo mumbled, smacking himself on the forehead. At the time, he had just wanted to get through the deal as quickly as possible so he had more time to work with. Niki had done that on purpose, he knew, forcing him into a corner by setting that time limit on top of his already ticking clock. But frustratingly, he hadn't been able to fight it too much because fighting it would take time.

Gods, he really hated Fey.

On top of that, once his deal dissolved at the border, he'd have to deal with Technoblade. Tubbo grimaced, shelving those plans for later. As much as he wanted to deal with the shrill ache of fear that nestled in his chest, there wasn't a point.

He needed to focus on his current trial. Afterwards, he'd try out a few of his plans. Technoblade might be threatening, but he wasn't going to go down without a fight.

And besides, he did have one advantage.

Tubbo dug into his pocket, pulling out his compass. It was a little worse for wear now, one side having a rather large dent in it. Must have happened when he had hit the ground at some point. He should probably be more concerned about the fact that he couldn't remember what could have cracked it but honestly, he was just happy he still had it.

"Surprised nobody tried to take it." Tubbo mumbled. He had been careful about hiding it but Fey were good at sniffing out what was valuable to someone. "No point in keeping this hidden anymore."

He remembered the direction he had walked, had the path under his feet, but that meant nothing in the Veil. The paths were safer, yes, but still subject to the whims of this world. There could be dozens of factors to it, from Niki's mood to the day of the week to whether he had thought about blood in the last five seconds.

Some of that had likely been exaggerated, factors so small they barely mattered. Niki couldn't change the border because of their deal. But that didn't mean the land couldn't cause problems.

If he used the compass, not only would he find the border, it would be as close as possible to the Winter Court. Tubbo watched the needle swing around to point to his left, the grass casing shimmering with violet magic. He started jogging, looking down every once in a while to check the compass was still pointing in the right direction.

Was Purpled and Ranboo doing alright? He hoped so. Surely, if Technoblade had hurt them for helping him, the other would have bragged about it, right? Which meant that they were fine.

Still, he couldn't quite quiet his unease. Maybe it was because of how the forest was silent as if holding its breath and waiting for a predator to finally reveal itself. Maybe it was the guilt he still had from the village.

All he knew was developing attachments to people other than Tommy was a huge pain to deal with. Now he had emotions and even more anxiety to deal with. Ugh. Tubbo sighed, checking his compass again.

One day, he'd also have to face the fact that Purpled and Ranboo were not the only ones to leave their mark on him. One day, he'd have to acknowledge that he didn't quite shudder in horror when he thought of Autumn and Summer. But today was not that day and Tubbo was getting very good at suppressing information he didn't want to think about.

For one, when he looked up again, the trees in front of him had woven into an impenetrable wall. "Really?" Tubbo said, half exasperated and half expectant. He had been hoping to make it a bit further before someone interrupted.

A warm arm draped over his shoulder, nearly making Tubbo jump out of his skin. It felt unnaturally heavy and as soon as he turned to the other, he realized why. It was like the man in front of him had been carved out of gold. His skin was an unnaturally smooth and flawless shade of gold, his eyes like carved emeralds. It hurt to look at him for too long and Tubbo had to blink away how his eyes watered at the reflection of the sunlight off his skin.

Draped over his shoulders was some kind of skin he didn't recognize, dark gray and riddled with scars from the creature's life.

When he smiled, his teeth were sharp, built to rip into muscle. "I think they look rather nice." The man said conversationally. "I built them myself."

"You're one of Niki's friends, I'm guessing." Tubbo said, eyeing the man's arm over his shoulders. He just needed to buy some time, get the other to let their guard down. Then, he'd

run. He had done it before, he could do it again.

The man tilted his head to the side. "I suppose you could call us that. We aren't very close but we do share someone in common." He said.

"So, either way, my guess will be wrong." Tubbo said, resisting the urge to roll his eyes. Why was it so hard for Fey to just say what they mean? Then again, he supposed this was a case of pot calling the kettle black. He at least was justified considering the Fey wanted to kill or capture him.

"Correct!" The Fae said cheerily. Tubbo shuddered at the sight of those sharp white teeth that were far too close to his unprotected skin. "Niki did offer me a reward if I was to capture you so I suppose you could call us friendly."

Of course that was what Fey considered friendly. "And what if I don't want to be caught?" Tubbo asked, stealthily scoping out any escape routes. Most were either through the trees or right past the Fae behind him. Not very ideal but not impossible. He just had to wait for the right moment.

"Well, you don't have many options, do you?" The Fae said with a shrug. "I don't know if you noticed, but you're kind of blocked in. But if you give me that compass of yours, I'll let you go."

"No." Tubbo said instantly, his grip tightening on the compass. He tucked it back into his pocket, pressing one hand over it to make sure that it was still there. "The compass is not for bargaining."

"Why not? If you don't accept the bargain, you'll be trapped and the compass will be useless anyways." The Fae pointed out. "If you give it to me, then you'll at least be able to move forward again. It's an easy bargain."

"Except for the fact that without the compass, I'll have to guess what direction I'm going." Tubbo said, his tone frosty. The path may take him to the border but there was no guarantee on how long it would take. Having the compass around tended to force the route to act a bit more normal, closer to his world. "And don't think I didn't notice you didn't say anything about not recapturing me after you get the compass. Just that I get to go free for an undetermined amount of time."

He was almost insulted. It was such an easy bargain to see through compared to the ones he had made before. The loophole was just on the edge of being blatantly spoken. If he was going to be tricked, he at least wanted a bit of effort to be put in.

"So, you are as clever as they say." The Fae said. "That's good to know."

"Mm." Tubbo said. "I just think you did a very poor job of constructing and presenting that bargain. How successful are you in ensnaring people, anyways?"

"Do you want a performance review or something?" The Fae said. "I usually prefer to work on other things like building. Far more entertaining and less weirdly squishy than you

mortals. What's next? Are you going to give me tips or something?"

"Yes. For starters, have a tighter grip." Tubbo said. He saw the Fae begin to tilt their head but instead of sticking around, he ducked under their arm, sprinting back the other way. He heard them curse and then the loud thump of footsteps behind him.

A hand brushed his collar and Tubbo reacted instinctively, throwing himself backwards and curling into a little ball. He gasped in pain as the Fae stumbled over him and fell, just barely rolling away before he was crushed. Even so the kicks to his back made him slow to scramble up, sprinting back the way he came.

"You're not getting out that way!" He heard from behind him. "Why even bother going back?"

Because he was. Grimacing in concentration, Tubbo scanned the wall of trees, looking for what he had seen earlier. He beamed when he found it, throwing a glance back to the Fae. They were slowly getting to their feet, probably thinking he was trapped.

"Second piece of advice for you." He said. "It's hard to construct traps for people who are smaller than you."

With that, he threw himself to his knees, squirming through the tiny crevice he had seen. It was hard to see from where he was standing and just barely big enough to fit someone of his size if he sucked in his stomach. For a giant like the Fae who had tried to capture him, it would have been barely noticeable and easily dismissed.

He heard a curse behind him, something high pitched and shrill in a language he didn't know. Tubbo refused to slow down, squirming forward until he finally popped free, rolling down a short hill into a ditch.

He leapt to his feet, sprinting forward while fumbling at his jacket. He pulled out the compass, glancing down when he hit a clear stretch of path. Perfect, he was still going the right way. The moon had not yet reached the middle of the sky so he was pretty sure that he was making great time.

Before him, he could hear the groaning of wood being moved, dry and crackling. Tubbo winced and quickened his pace. He was quick but the Fae had a height advantage on him. Every step of his had to be at least three of Tubbo's.

Seriously, what was with Fey and being taller than him? He was going to have to file a complaint. He was certain there had been tiny Fey in the stories he had heard. But only Fundy had come anywhere near his size. It was completely unfair.

He dodged around a tree, scanning the path ahead. He just needed a way to lose the Fae. A hard task considering the Fae had home turf advantage but he had pulled it off before. Tubbo gritted his teeth. He wasn't losing now. Not like this.

"Slow down!" The Fae cheerfully called out from behind him. Tubbo gritted his teeth. He just needed to get to a better spot. He ducked around a tree, scanning. There! He threw

himself forward, crouching down.

“Really? The berry bushes?” The Fae said, sounding annoyed. Tubbo cackled. If they didn’t want him going into the berry bushes, they shouldn’t have any. Not his fault there was so much fruit plants everywhere.

He crept through the bushes, ignoring how the overripe berries popped and splattered underneath his hands. It wouldn’t slow the Fae down for long. Unlike the hunters in the Summer Court, his skin seemed a bit tougher. Stomping through the berry brambles was something he looked like he could do with ease.

But he didn’t want to slow him down. He just wanted to get out of view.

He held his breath, creeping slowly through the bushes. He had to twist and turn, refusing to shake any branches. At every moment, he was certain the Fae would swoop down upon him and scoop him up. But nothing happened. Instead, the Fey’s grumbling began to get quieter and quieter.

Tubbo nearly cackled again when he broke into empty air. He glanced over his shoulder. Through the trees, he could see the golden skinned Fae searching the bushes. He had his chance! Now he just needed to get going while the going was good.

Every muscle in him screamed for him to start running. At any moment, the Fae could look up and see him. His outfit made him stick out like a sore thumb, all shades of brown, not to mention the black splash of Schlatt’s jacket. But if he started running now, the Fae would hear him and then he would be caught for sure.

Tubbo forced himself to creep slowly over the ground, trying his hardest to hold his breath. It was slow, excruciating so. His legs were beginning to cramp as he slowly inched forward, grateful for the soft grass under his boots. This would have never worked in the Autumn Court, the crunching of the dry leaves would have given him away in seconds.

He risked another glance back. The Fae had their back turned to him. He was terrified, his heart beating against his ribs like a scared rabbit. Were they messing with him? Had he actually gotten away? Or were they just pretending not to see him to have a bit of fun at his expense? Maybe he should start running.

No, Tubbo told himself sternly. He had already put so much effort into this. If he broke cover now, getting caught was basically a guarantee. The Fae was so tall, he’d cross the distance in no time at all. Oh, that rhymed. Neat. He’d have to note that down to tell Tommy.

“Come out, come out, wherever you are.” The Fae called. “Come on, I want to get my reward and go back to building. I can show you what I’m building if you’d like! It’d make a great way to fill up the rest of the night.”

Tempting, but he’d have to decline. Tubbo inched around a tree, feeling far more relaxed once he was behind it. It wasn’t great cover, but at least he wouldn’t get seen immediately if the Fae turned around. Another little bit of safety.

What were Fe buildings like anyways? Other than the Winter Court village he had glimpsed and Schlatt's dramatic tree, he hadn't seen any other buildings. Maybe they lived under hills like the older stories said? He was pretty sure the village that Karl had trapped him in didn't count. Nobody seemed to live there, not even those trapped inside.

"Really? You're going to be like this?" The Fae complained as if Tubbo was the one being a problem here. Tubbo rolled his eyes, carefully stepping over a root. It would suck to get caught just because he tripped. "It's not so bad. Niki will treat you well."

Yeah, until she got bored of him. Until she broke her little pet under centuries and centuries of making it dance for her amusement. Tubbo had heard far too many stories of people who had caught the interest of Fey, whether on purpose or not, and it never ended well. At best, you were returned to the world of the mortal, forever changed and with everyone you loved long gone. At worst, he recalled a story where an unlucky person was turned into a immortal stag and was still being hunted today.

Very cheery people, the Fey.

He'd rather take his chances with Schlatt and Dream over Niki. As terrible as they were, as terrified he was that they were tricking him, something told him that they weren't tricking him. That they weren't twisting the truth when they say that he will be taken care of, that he'll never be hurt again. It should scare him that he believes them, that some of his instinctive fear has faded, but at this point, he's tired of feeling guilty and scared.

It gives them far too much power over him, how much space they take up in his head even when he's not near them. Tubbo scowls, staring at his hands. They were covered in red berry juice. It looked like he had killed someone.

Just a bit longer. He reminded himself. The Fae's grumblings were almost out of earshot now. He'd go a bit further to make sure they couldn't hear him. And then, he'd take off running again. Hopefully, even if they heard him, he'd have a decent headstart.

Ugh. He really would have rather preferred having a bit more of a plan other than run away very slowly and then start running fast. But this Fae was unfortunately an unknown quantity. His knowledge of the Spring Court was so sparse, he only knew of Niki and that was in a handful of stories, a few of which he was certain were made up.

Like come on, a Fey queen marrying a pirate? So fake.

He inched forward, eyeing the holly bush he had decided would be his unofficial marker. Just a bit further and he would be home free. It almost felt unreal.

Tubbo bit down on his lip, trying to make sure he didn't let anything slip as he slowly stood. It felt so good to be standing up straight again, the relief was immediate. He was going to bedridden for days after this adventure. Tommy would joke that he was becoming an old man.

Alright. Deep breath in. Deep breath out. One more. Tubbo checked behind him. He didn't see the Fae anymore, nor could he hear their whispered bargains and threats. It wasn't a

guarantee, they could be anywhere. But it seemed unlikely enough. They had been so bold about confronting him before.

He grinned before turning away, beginning to run. Finally, he could-

He slammed right into someone, their heavy cloak barely cushioning the blow. Tubbo fell back with a poorly smothered yelp, looking up.

Standing above him was another Fae. This one was shorter than the one before, looking more human. They had a rich red summer dress on, contrasting their white over cloak. The cloak seemed to shimmer as he looked at it, turning all colors of the rainbow. Perched on their head was a golden crown, simpler than Technoblade's but no less imposing. They would look almost normal if it weren't for the dark glasses hiding their eyes.

How long had they been watching him?

"I'd rather you not do that." The Fae said, a smile playing over their lips. "It's nothing personal, but I don't want to ruin my dress by running through the bushes."

Tubbo tried to throw himself backwards but with a yelp of pain, one of the fae's heeled boots was pressing down on his hand. Tubbo forced himself to hold still, but he couldn't quite stop how he trembled under the Fae's gaze. One move, and they could crush his hand beyond repair.

"My name is Eret." The fae said. "Can you give me your name?"

"That's the oldest trick in the book." Tubbo said. And not even the first time it had been pulled on him. It wasn't excitingly novel anymore, just old and annoying. "How about you give me your name."

"That's not how that works." Eret said with a click of their tongue. Tubbo shrugged. It had been worth a try. "Now, are you going to go run off again?"

"No." Tubbo lied. From Eret's raised eyebrow, they didn't believe him. He spun into babble mode, hoping that he could distract this one too. "You can totally trust me. I have never ran in my life. Running? What's that?"

Eret chuckled. "That's not going to work," She said. "I saw what you did with Foolish."

"Who?" Tubbo said confused. And then his eyes widened. "His nickname is Foolish? That's--"

Actually, it's kind of cool. He couldn't find much fault in it. Even had a bit of dramatic effect. He stilled preferred his nickname, but Foolish wasn't bad.

"He picked it out himself." Eret said with the familiar ease of someone who was long used to it. The way he talked about Foolish was similar to how he used to talk about Tommy. "Now." He said, leaning in closer.

Tubbo swallowed hard, breathing slowly as Eret moved his shoe away. Even when it was gone, he felt like he couldn't move, pinned under their gaze.

"I think it's time we went back." Eret said. Her words were cold and certain. Tubbo swallowed hard. If he went with him, back to Foolish, there was no way he could escape both of them. He'd be caught within moments.

"Why are you doing this? He whispered. Maybe he could bargain his way out. Maybe he could convince them. All of his plans had been shattered and he was grasping at straws, desperate for something to come up in his favor.

Eret shrugged, something bittersweet in his eyes. "Once upon a time, I failed someone who needed me." He said. "And now I see them in you."

Tubbo gaped at them. What did that even mean? He had no idea how he was supposed to use that. Eret reached for him and Tubbo threw himself backwards, scrambling into the forest. Behind him, he could hear the slow languid thud of footsteps. His heart felt like it had chosen to move into his throat, choking him. This was a stupid decision, they'd catch up in moments.

He just needed to get away-

A hand grabbed his arm, pulling him to the side. Another hand pressed against his mouth stifling his yelp as he was yanked into a warm chest. "Quiet." They hissed into his ears. "If you don't want to get caught, do as I say."

Chapter End Notes

Foolish wasn't supposed to show up. I was trying to write Eret and Foolish spontaneously generated.

Foxglove

Chapter Notes

I'VE BEEN PLANNING THIS FOR SO LONG-

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tubbo squirmed trying to break free. There was no way he was going to trust some stranger who had suddenly grabbed him. For all he knew, there was a bounty out for his head and enough competition that someone would think it's a good idea to fight over him. That did not sound like his idea of a good time.

"I swear to the winds, if you keep fighting, I'm going to push you in this damn tree and hold you there until all you can think about is letting your leaves fall for autumn." They hiss. Tubbo froze. He recognized that voice. "Hold still. My ability doesn't work if you're moving."

It felt like he was trying to fight a wave. Tubbo slowly, agonizingly, against his better instinct, stilled. Part of him screamed, said to fight. But the other part of him told him that if he fought, he'd get caught anyway.

With bated breath, he watched as Eret stepped around the tree, so close he could reach out and grab that pretty cloak of theirs. The Fae slowly surveyed the area and Tubbo held his breath.

This was it, the Fae holding him would laugh and mock him for believing it. He'd be shoved into Eret's awaiting arms and held prisoner until he lost the deal. Or Eret would catch a glimpse of them from the corner of his eyes or-

Tubbo froze as Eret's head turned, his gaze landing squarely on them. He felt horribly obviously. There wasn't so much as an overhanging branch to provide cover. They were standing there as bare as day. He braced, waiting for smug words.

And then Eret looked away. Tubbo watched, open mouthed, as the Fae turned and walked away. Humming and surveying the area with a crease in his brow that spoke of confusion, uncertainty.

He forced himself to hold still until the other was well out of sight. It felt like entire forests could live and die in the time it took for Eret's white cloak to drift out of view. Even so, Tubbo didn't let himself relax.

The grip over his mouth relaxed and moved away. Tubbo coughed, wiping away bits of fur as he pulled away. "Fundy?" He hissed. "What are you doing here?"

“Having a nice cup of tea.” The fox snapped back irritably, their ears flicking. They glanced around warily. “Are you trying to get caught? Your voice could be heard for miles.”

“It is not.” Tubbo said. But he was quieter this time, cowed. He had no idea where Foolish was. Neither he nor Eret would be very far away. “What did you just do?”

“Glamour. Only holds as long as you stay still though. One move, and it breaks.” Fundy said with a shrug. Tubbo slumped a bit, all thoughts of a deal going out of his head. It wouldn’t be very useful if he had to hold in place after all. “And before you ask, no, I don’t have any true invisibility spells. That’s upper domain stuff, the kind the very oldest and most powerful Fey use. Anything lesser, and there’s always a drawback or giveaway.”

“That’s awfully kind of you to tell me.” Tubbo said, eyeing him suspiciously.

He hadn’t seen the fox Fae since the Autumn Court and hadn’t expected to see him again. While Fundy seemed to be a high level in the Court, Schlatt was the kind of person who would want a personal touch to his work.

But that didn’t mean he wasn’t dangerous. After all, he was here, in the heart of the Spring Court. He couldn’t underestimate what the fox could be after, especially after Technoblade’s words.

“Well, we’re kind of on a time limit.” Fundy said, brushing off imaginary lint from his jacket. He was avoiding Tubbo’s eyes, he noticed. “To a border by sunrise, yes? We need to get moving soon.”

“I need to get moving. When did you become part of this?” Tubbo said warily. And how did the other know? Foolish and Eret, he understood, as it sounded like they were tasked by Niki with capturing him. But Fundy was Autumn Court, surely Fey alliances didn’t stretch like that?

“Long as I hold still, I can be anywhere.” Fundy said. Tubbo nearly growled. That still didn’t answer the question of how an Autumn Court Fey ended up in the Spring Court.

“So, you were watching us then?” Tubbo said. Fundy nodded. “Why not reveal yourself?”

“I’m not exactly permitted to be here.” Fundy said. The closest thing to an answer he had gotten.

“Did Schlatt send you?” The name felt like a stone falling from his lips. The forest felt quieter, more tense.

Fundy growled. “Here’s a bit of advice for you. Don’t say a ruler’s name, especially in another Court.” Fundy said. “It calls for attention and I’m betting you don’t want that.”

Tubbo groaned. He had messed up so many times then. And it would explain a lot. He’d have to be more careful of what he said in the future. “But did he?”

“Yes and no.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Tubbo said, taking a half step back. “I’m kind of busy, I don’t have time to stand around and play word games. I thought you knew that.”

“You’re no fun.” Fundy said. His ears flicked. “I was supposed to keep an eye on you by skirting around the borders. Pass along to him if something interesting happens. But helping you now, that’s a personal mission of mine.”

“Out of the kindness of your heart, I’m guessing?” Tubbo said dryly. Fundy grinned at him, an odd sight on a face that was mostly Fox like. “But really. Why are you helping me?”

“Let’s just say I have personal business with a member of the Spring Court and helping you out is a phenomenal piece of revenge.” Fundy said, grinning. “No strings attached, no deals necessary. It practically is out of the kindness of my heart.”

On one hand, if this was true, it could be very good. Alone, his chances of escape were... variable. With Fundy? With glamour and the knowledge of a Fae on his side? High. Very high.

But on the other hand, not having a deal was dangerous. Deals were as much protection for him as they were for the interest of the Fae. They gave them rules to follow, criteria to hit in order to make sure he succeeded as well. Without having a deal and heading off any possibility of sabotage, Fundy could decide he was bored and skip out in five minutes.

It wasn’t exactly a comfortable position to be put in. But was pushing to make a deal now even worth it? Whatever Fundy’s vendetta was, the only reason he was assisting for free was because of it. Bringing in a deal would mean having to discuss prices. And he wasn’t quite sure if it was a good idea to be entangled in yet another deal.

Funny. Weeks ago, if someone had told him he’d been making deals and using his charm to the fullest, he would have shrugged and laughed. He wouldn’t think he’d get so tired about it. It dragged now, words coming in practice eased instead of carefully chosen patterns. And the thought of how practiced he had gotten worried him.

Tubbo shook his head. Not much he could do about that right now. “And you won’t turn around and hand me to Schlatt?” He said warily. That was his main concern right now. He had a sinking feeling that whatever help Fundy offered, it ended at the border.

He had planned for what to do if he ended up back in Schlatt’s clutches. Schemed and theorized and planned out long lasting schemes and manipulations. What bargain he’d be willing to offer if he was desperate. The years of his life were precious to him but he was willing to lose a few if he could spend the rest of his life with Tommy.

But he had a sinking feeling Schlatt wouldn’t be quite as easy or good natured as when they last met. Call him crazy, but Technoblade telling him about how Schlatt had practically put a bounty out for his torture, didn’t make him feel confident in his chances.

And Fundy’s near feral grin didn’t help matters either. “Wouldn’t you like to know.” He purred. So, basically, no. Tubbo surveyed the forest around them, checking that they were still safe as he thought the offer over.

Practically speaking, in the short term, it made sense. He already had it confirmed that two Fey were pursuing him, both of whom nearly captured him. He had no idea if more Fey had been sent after him, what abilities they would have, or if Niki herself would choose to pursue him. Having Fundy around would make his trip to the border much safer, if more nerve wracking. Though that depended on if Fundy was telling the truth for his reasoning in the first place.

Because on the other hand, it was incredibly risky. He had it near confirmed that Technoblade's Hunt would resume when he left the Spring Court and that the other royals may make a move as well. If he traveled with Fundy, that would put him within very easy grabbing distance and that was really the least of what the fox could do to him.

He hated trades where he wasn't really winning on either side.

With a shake of his head, Tubbo spoke: "I suppose this will be an interesting trip then." He said. It wasn't confirmed out loud but both of them knew the truth. Fundy would be traveling with him.

It was a tough decision and he wouldn't be surprised if he regretted it in the future. But right now, it made too much sense for him to turn them. Maybe he could use the extra time that he had gained to plan out how to get out of the border situation.

"Pleasure traveling with you." Fundy said. "Let's get going! We have a long way to travel and not a long time to do it."

Tubbo snorted. Didn't he know it? Reluctantly, he pulled out his compass, checking the direction. He flinched back as a furry paw reached for it. "Hands off, that's mine." Tubbo said, near growling.

Fundy shrugged, putting his hands up. "Can't fault a guy for being curious."

"Yes I can."

"You're rude then." Fundy said, brushing his feelings away easily. "I didn't see that when you were in the Autumn Court. Is it new? What does it do?"

"No. It's based on the tracking compasses from the Summer Court." Tubbo said, the word short and clipped. Fundy subsided with a satisfied smile and Tubbo turned his gaze back towards the compass face. He wasn't going to be revealing Purpled and Ranboo to anyone, least of all Fundy right now. Better to have the other assume that he had gotten the compass from the Summer Court. "We need to go this direction."

"Sounds about right if you're heading for the border for Winter. It's a bit risky though. It'd be easier to cut through Autumn, there's paths that lead straight to the palace from there. Quick as a wink." Tubbo rolled his eyes. The manipulation wasn't even subtle on that attempt. If he put one foot into the Autumn Court, he wouldn't be walking out again. Schlatt would weave a web of lies and tricks so thick that he'd never find his way out.

He started walking, trusting Fundy would follow. After a moment, he could see bright red fur in the corner of his eye. "Is this going to be a recurring thing?" Tubbo asked. He'd like to have an idea about whether he should keep on his toes or not.

Fundy shrugged. "Not really." He said. "I'm not really into the whole subtle thing. If you're not going, I kind of doubt I could convince you to go. My job is only to report back with any information I find."

Tubbo paused for a moment, staring at Fundy. "That's almost kind of you." He said. The fox huffed and glanced away. For a moment, the other actually sounded normal. Like he understood how terrible it was for the Fey to try and capture him. It wasn't great, no, but it was close.

"Don't say that, you'll make people think I've gone soft." Fundy said with a grumble. Tubbo snorted. He didn't think there was anyone who could believe a Fae had gone soft. Going soft for a Fae was like wrapping a knife in tissue paper. It was softer, yes, but it wouldn't take much for it to still cut you.

"I'm going to drive your reputation into the ground, big man." He said gleefully, dancing away from Fundy's half hearted swat. "Everyone's gonna say Fundy, he's so soft. So nice."

"Yeah? Might be kind of a terrible thing to do to your fellow mortals." Fundy said. And there was the knife. Tubbo winced, looking away. It was easy to distract himself by watching the plants around them as he walked.

Some were normal. He saw creeping strawberry plants with berries the size of his fist, a blueberry bush so heavy with berries that it looked like it was about to fall over. He could feel his stomach rumble and it made him flush a bit, hunching in on himself. He could feel Fundy's amused gaze in between his shoulders and it rankled at him.

Eyes on the price, Tubbo reminded himself. He'd eat afterwards. He wasn't going to come this far and then bury himself in debt so he could eat fruit.

Other plants were more... odd. He saw a tree laden in the strange purple fruit that was in that pie, strangely tall and twisted, it's bark violent purple. There was a hanging vine that looked like it was dripping blood. Flowers that looked so vibrantly beautiful and perfect that he drew closer, fascinated.

Fundy pulled him back as the petals snapped shut on where his hand had been. "Don't get too close to those. They'll take a finger off and I don't feel like dealing with your weird mortal ooze." Fundy said. Tubbo flushed, his head feeling a bit clearer now.

Good to know that even the local flora wanted to kill him. Fantastic.

He really wanted to go home where the worst plant he had to deal with was mint. The plant kept trying to take over his garden to the point that he had to let Tommy loose on it with a bundle of matches. Tommy claimed he liked setting it on fire but Tubbo knew he secretly loved that one scraggly holly bush in the corner.

His train of memory came to an abrupt stop as a warm paw closed around his arm, pulling him to a stop. Tubbo glanced back at Fundy. “What’s wrong?” He asked. The fox’s ears were pinned back, his lips curled in a silent snarl. When Tubbo looked around, he couldn’t see anything.

“I smell saltwater.” Fundy said, surveying the trees. Tubbo frowned. What was that supposed to mean? He didn’t exactly go around sniffing everybody and everything. That would be kind of awkward. “Hold still.”

This time, he could feel the tingle of magic as it settled over his skin. Strangely, it didn’t smell of warm gingerbread or the crisp autumn breeze like Schlatt’s. It didn’t have the same coolness or prickling feeling. Fundy’s magic was freezing, the smell more akin to the smell of roasting chestnuts.

Tubbo dismissed the thoughts, breathing shallowly. Seconds crawled by and then minutes. For a moment, he wondered if Fundy had been mistaken. Maybe whatever it was, it had already passed through and Fundy was simply being paranoid. He wouldn’t put it past him. He had been here for less than two weeks and his nerves were stretched to the breaking point. He had no idea what it must be like to live here.

But it was that same paranoia that kept him locked in place as well, afraid to question it. Fundy could be wrong. This could be a trap. But on the off chance that it wasn’t, on the off chance that Fundy was telling the truth, he didn’t want to move.

It felt like forever had passed by in fits and starts before Tubbo contemplated asking Fundy. He opened his mouth, curious and concerned.

And then the branch snapped.

If there was a level past frozen, he had probably reached it. Tubbo stood stock still, watching as the shadows shifted. The golden skin and dark cloak were far too familiar for comfort. Foolish surveyed the clearing and Tubbo had to fight down the urge to flinch when the other’s gaze passed over him.

“He can’t see you.” He reminded himself. You need to trust Fundy. But it was hard, even knowing that the magic worked, the fight or flight reflex was strong. Having to stand and wait felt like torture.

“I could have sworn they would come this way.” Foolish said. He almost sounded put out. As if this was a minor frustration, something to be sighed at.

“They may yet have.” Eret said. Next to Foolish, she looked laughably tiny. But Tubbo didn’t dismiss them for that. The other had been fully willing to crush his hand rather than let him escape. They were no less dangerous out of the two.

“But we’ve backtracked as far as they could have gotten.” Foolish complained. “Unless the kid decided to stop for a break or shift paths which is unlikely.”

Tubbo winced. This was his fault then. When Foolish had caught sight of his compass, the other must have been able to use that knowledge to guess their path. But there wasn't much he could do about it. Varying too far from the compass route might make them lose precious time and he couldn't afford that at this stage of the game.

"They may not have." Eret said with a sigh. Fundy stiffened, tightening their grip on Tubbo's arm. Eret raised his head, one hand rubbing at his forehead. "Fundy? Are you around here?"

A growl was Tubbo's only warning before Fundy lunged forward, dragging him past the duo and through the trees. He yelped, arms pinwheeling as he fought to stay on his feet as they ran. It was all he could do to stay on his feet, Fundy's quick pace impossible to match. It felt less like running and more like being dragged. Behind him, he could hear the pounding of footsteps.

"Fundy! Please stop!"

"Fundy!"

"I'm sorry!"

It felt like ages before they slowed to a stop, before the footsteps and voices of their pursuers died off. Tubbo collapsed to the ground, wheezing for air. It felt like fire was burning in his lungs, choking him and cutting off his air.

"What the hell was that?" He wheezed out, looking up. Fundy was standing, one paw braced against a tree, eyes wild.

"It's a long story." They growled out.

"I think we'll have plenty of time." Tubbo said, pushing himself up. The moon hadn't reached the halfway point yet and when he checked his compass, he could see that they had ran in the right direction. The trees were thinner now, the air colder. Not quite the border but getting close. "Because I'm not going anywhere with you until you explain what just happened. You could have gotten us caught by breaking cover like that."

Fundy opened his mouth as if he wanted to argue before closing it and slumping slightly, his ears pinned and tail drooping. "Yeah." He said. "Yeah maybe talking about it would be good."

Tubbo let himself lean against the tree as Fundy settled down. Magic fizzled around the fox's paws, a familiar current laying against his skin. "Are you ready to hear a story?"

And all he could do was nod.

time TO EARN THAT DARK SBI TAG

Irises

Chapter Notes

Warning: Minor description of gore, minor character death

Fundy's story could be a whole book by itself.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

I'm sure you already know this story. It was a common myth when I roamed the human world though maybe not quite as detailed. The story is about why fox fur changes colors through the seasons. It's also my story, admittedly simplified after so many years being passed around by mortals.

You're shaking your head? No? Well, that's annoying. I suppose I'll tell you the entire story then.

It began as a courtship for the ages, a Fae prince sweeping a human maiden off her feet. They fall in love, they marry, she gives birth to a bouncing baby boy. Albeit a baby who spent half his time as a fox kit.

He's never really quite sure why Sally had married Wilbur. From the bits and pieces he knew, she had been a comparatively normal mortal. Little village, quiet life. Wilbur had liked talking about her hair, would ruffle Fundy's and joke about how they both have hair as red as flames. Or in his case now, fur.

Maybe she had been bored. Bored of a mortal life and a small town where the strangest tales were about the hens down the road laying blue eggs. Maybe she thought that she could change the Fey prince, tame him into something kinder. More loving. She certainly wouldn't be the first to have that goal. Every few centuries, a mortal fell in love with a Fae. A few knew that the love was the love given towards something wild, to expect nothing in return and cut their losses when they were ahead. Most thought that they would be the exception, the happy love story amidst tragedy. Sometimes it worked out, and a tragedy was more bittersweet than tragic.

Sometimes, it didn't.

For whatever reason, she married Wilbur.

His birth had been considered a minor miracle. It was rare for a Fey to be born, the process of which usually took centuries of magic circulating in a certain area until it built up enough to become something more. His Uncle Technoblade, he knew, had been born from a centuries old battlefield where so much blood had watered the grass that it had become permanently

red. More common was for a mortal to become Fey but even that transition was rare. It took a certain type of mortal to attract a Fae's attention and rarer still to survive what came after.

He was supposed to be born cursed. Mortal at best. Children of the Fey and the mortal didn't turn out well, the two heritages unable to balance. Everyone had been shocked when he had been seen to be healthy and perfectly, unmistakably Fey. Moments after birth, he turned into a fox for the first time and stayed that way for months.

Sometimes he wondered if he had been cursed, but of the mind, not the body. What seemed normal to other Fey seemed abnormal to him. Maybe if he had been a changeling or sprung from a sunlit glade, he would have been happy in the Winter Court with his family.

Three months after Fundy is born, Wilbur freezes Sally into a sculpture. It sets the tone for most of his childhood. He was Wilbur's first and foremost. Not his own person.

He's never quite sure why Wilbur married Sally. If it were love or boredom. Sometimes, on the good days, he liked to think Wilbur had wanted a child. That he had married her to make Fundy. Or maybe that he really did love her. That theory, Uh, kind of ignored how he then froze her. Maybe it was just his mortal parentage but he really hadn't liked that.

The statue had his fur ruffle when he was younger. She looked happy. One hand holding a frosted line connected to a hook, the other reaching to the side as if trying to find something or someone. She didn't look horrified or scared. Just happy as if she hadn't seen it coming, out for a lovely day of fishing. It gave him the creeps.

Luckily, he never spent much time in his room outside of getting dressed or the occasional game. Living with immortal beings who didn't need sleep meant there was no shortage of babysitters for him. If he wasn't tucked in Wilbur's arms, he was following Technoblade or sleeping in Philza's nest.

It was nice. Looking back, his childhood had been great. When he wanted something, he got it. He was given all the love and affection he could ever want or need. If he wept, his father wiped his tears away. If he was bored, Technoblade seemed to know a million stories. If he was scared, Philza would let him hide under his wings.

They always seemed to know when he was happy or sad or scared. When he wanted to run and hide, one of them always found him. He was never alone.

It was great. Until he got older.

Because when he got older, the same things that made him feel comforted, also made him chafe and snap at the restraints. If he wandered away from Technoblade, they'd snag him by the ear and drag him back. If he left the nest, Philza would scoop him up moments later and toss him back in with a warning chirp.

And Wilbur was the worst of all.

Requests to sleep alone were met with lullabies that made him fall asleep right there in Wilbur's arms. Hiding spots were quickly discovered and he would spend days being carried

around. Days without touching the floor, aching to explore and prove himself.

It wasn't exactly hard for them to do. He had always been quick on his feet, a side effect of being part fox, but he was also far smaller and lighter.

The worst of it was being treated as a child. It was common enough among Fey, the youngest were always treated with extreme delicacy. Changelings in particular who were taken as children, never moved on from the child stage. They were coddled, loved but kept captive. There was no room to make deals of their own, to make their own story, and find their own road.

But he wasn't a Changeling, one of those eternal children who never grew up. As the years went on, he changed. But his family didn't.

He argued, of course he did. Threw the same stories they told him as a child back in their faces. He had been around fifty then, young for a Fey, but old enough to start venturing into the world. Old enough to leave his goddamn room without being carried around.

They were such hypocrites. At fifty, Wilbur sang an entire village into delirium, making them dance until they died. At forty, Techno fought an entire war by himself and was crowned emperor of a nation he ruled for a decade before getting bored and disappearing. At twenty, Philza had defeated the Ender Dragon while chained with iron manacles that he then broke himself.

For fuck's sake, they were still going out throughout his childhood. One was always left to watch him but he'd spent far too much time watching them leave. Wilbur would kiss his forehead and promise sweets before striding away. Technoblade would ruffle his fur and tell him they'd have more stories. Philza would just disappear, crows lingering behind to keep him company. They'd come back bloodstained and exhilarant, basking in their deeds.

So, at the comparative age of fifty, he was practically clawing at the door. Looking back, he had been ready to go for a decade. But the excuses seemed more logical then, the stories more believable. It became a routine, something that happened once a month.

He'd whine about being bored, ask about going to the mortal world. Just for a little while. Maybe find his first mortal to enchant by himself, strike his first deal.

(Don't think I can't see you glaring at me. That's normal. You've struck your fair share of deals yourself by now.)

First would come the excuses.

"We can't let you go right now, mate. The Summer and Spring Courts hold the power currently, allowing you out of our territory would be like waving a chorus fruit under their nose."

And then the guilt.

“Is Dad not being entertaining enough? I’m so sorry, kit. If you want, I can bring you a mortal! Picked out especially for you. It’ll be like we’re doing together, a father and son bonding experience. Don’t tell me you do want to spend time with your father?”

And then the threats.

“If you step a single paw outside the castle without one of us with you, I’ll shatter your legs.”

He was pretty sure that given the choice, Wilbur would have enchanted him like a Changeling. Only his natural defenses as a born fey protected him, kept him safe from the fuzzy memories and instincts of a Changeling that came from the magic turning them.

His father reacted to any request for freedom, to be treated as the near adult Fey that he was, with revulsion and distaste. If he wanted to make a deal, Wilbur would make it for him. If he wanted someone dead, his family would kill them. If he stepped one paw too close to a door, he’d be dragged away.

It was extremely frustrating to say the least. If he had been born mortal in some tiny village somewhere, he would already be off making his own way through the world. If he had sprung up as a naturally born Fey, he would already be beginning to exercise his own magic. He longed for those as ridiculous as it sounded. Longed to do something.

Instead he was trapped. The shapeshifter child of the royal family who didn’t want another warrior or deal weaver or king. They wanted child Fundy, the sweet trickster who would roll around as a little fox kit. Of course, he didn’t know how true that sentiment was back then, but looking back now?

He was foolish. Convinced that one day, he’d prove himself to their ridiculously high standards, that eventually they’d remember his age. They were overprotective, yes, but some part of him held out hope that there was reason behind it. That surely it would have to end and they would let him take his own path.

(Don’t you roll your eyes. They’re- they were my family. I was a kit, I trusted them).

But it all came to an end one day when he overheard a terrifying conversation.

He had been hiding from Philza, tucked behind a bloody curtain from some unfortunate mortal being slain too close. It hadn’t been cleaned yet and it made the perfect cover. The strange iron tang of mortal blood confused his family’s nose, letting him hide longer than usual. In the distance, he could hear the cawing of crows and he knew Philza would be furious when they found him.

His hiding spot meant that when Wilbur and Technoblade came walking down the hallway, neither knew he was there.

“I want my child back.” Wilbur said heatedly. Fundy had tilted his head confused. But he was still in the castle. He wasn’t gone. Did Wilbur have another child? It wasn’t out of the question.

“It takes time. I’ve got some of our best working on it but it can only be sped up so much.” Technoblade had growled. “The spell itself is complicated and the timing means that it takes at least a month to wait for the right moon cycle. The components themselves are another matter entirely.”

Ritual magic. It had taken all he had not to burst out and ask questions. He liked ritual magic, even then, the idea of it was alluring. With the right components and a good sense of timing, one could change the way the world worked. He had been allowed to play in simple rituals before, baby stuff like changing the speed a tree grew. Always under close guard with one of his family members by his side, primed to whisk him away at any moment. It was their favorite bribe, something to coax him into acting his part.

But what Technoblade spoke of was real ritual magic, the stuff usually hidden away after it was created so it could be used as an advantage.

“But I want it done now.” Wilbur had whined. He paused. “Maybe we should ask that new Fae to do it. The one who’s been flitting around and playing with time. Then it’ll be done quicker.”

“And trust a stranger with the kit?” Technoblade said. He’d frozen then, something cold and disbelieving in his stomach. They were talking about him?

“True. I just, I’m so tired of him acting up. I want my baby back.” Wilbur said. In that moment, he had been sure someone had cursed him, stealing the breath from his lungs. Unhearing of his pain, Wilbur had continued: “He never used to be this argumentative, you know? He was so little and cute and happy. But now he constantly asks to go out into the world! It’s like he doesn’t even care anymore, he just wants to leave us forever!”

That wasn’t what he wanted. He didn’t want to leave forever, he just wanted to explore by himself. Enchant a few mortals, figure out himself without his family constantly looming over his shoulder. See what chaos he could cause. But always, his idea of freedom had ended with him coming home because as overprotective as they could be, they were family. He would never want to leave forever.

Part of him wanted to run out and explain himself. But terror kept him rooted to the floor.

“I know.” Technoblade has said, and wasn’t that a blow to the heart. “Just a bit longer. The irises in the Spring Court will be plucked soon and that’ll be the last of it. Once the solar eclipse has arrived, we won’t have to worry again.”

The next bit had been too garbled to hear, their voices faded by distance. He had scrambled out of his hiding space, running just for the feeling of running. Of feeling like he was escaping, even if he didn’t know where he was running to. Philza had caught him soon after and he was returned to the next.

The next time he saw Wilbur and Technoblade, it was like the conversation had never happened. Wilbur had scooped him up in a tight hug as Technoblade watched and for a moment, he wondered if he had imagined it. They had his favorites for dinner that night and

Technoblade told him his favorite story even as he complained about how many times he had needed to retell it.

And wonders of all wonders, Wilbur promised that in a few months, he would be allowed to go to the mortal world. Heavily guarded but he'd finally be leaving the castle. Everything felt perfect.

Until he smelled irises on Technoblade's cloak a few days later. The next time he stole away, it was to the library. It wasn't out of character, he did it a lot at that age. Before, it had been to find the perfect spell, the one that would make them acknowledge him as an adult.

This time it would be to find the ritual they described. He didn't know much, but he knew enough that he hoped to find at least a vague description of it.

It took three escape attempts before he pieced it together, three terrifying attempts where he had to hide what he was reading and frantically redirect his family when they found him. For all that he believed that they loved him, some part of him knew that should his family discover what he was trying to find, he'd have no hope left.

Eventually, his search led him to the subject of time manipulation.

(Don't look so surprised. Maybe you haven't realized this yet, but certain laws of the world are more malleable than mortals think. There's room for bending, for breakage. Time is one of these. It's easier to use these rituals on mortals, yes, which is where all the stories of sudden youth or age come from.

But that doesn't mean casting a similar ritual on a Fae is impossible. Usually, even among the fierce politics of the Courts, they were rarely used.

Usually.)

He nearly missed the ritual because of those irises. The original time manipulation ritual didn't have irises. It was a stroke of luck that in a fit of panicked redirection, he picked up a book that did mention them.

Irises were used in memory alteration rituals.

The days after that passed in a blur. He hadn't wanted to believe what he found, the conclusions he was pulling together. But every piece of it fell in order and the more he watched his family, the more he knew that his conclusions were true.

What he had thought was him finally making headway was mere indulgences.

When he secretly searched Wilbur's closet, he found boxes and boxes of his old kit clothes, freshly dusted off. Stuffed animals he hadn't used in years suddenly appeared in Philza's nest with the old man laughing off his offense. Even Technoblade's sparring which should have grown fiercer with the impending trip, had suddenly relaxed.

All of it forming one awful conclusion.

Wilbur wanted his kit back and he was going to do it by forcing his internal clock to turn back, then wiping any memories. He'd be the same sweet little kit he was when he was merely a decade old.

And no doubt, the promised expedition would be when it happened. The expedition day was to take place on a solar eclipse, a time of good luck and safe travels. And coincidentally, a time when ritual magic was at its strongest.

Thinking of it made him sick to his stomach. Were it not for the luck of hearing that conversation, he would have walked into an ambush thinking that it was a kindness.

Ironically, it was his years trying to seem more mature that saved him. Otherwise, he would have been found immediately. It had taken every scrap of determination he possessed not to curse them out, to bite and claw when Wilbur lovingly pulled him into his lap and asked what song he wanted his father to play.

All he knew was that he couldn't be here when the ritual time came. Otherwise, all would be lost.

And so, he finally planned what his family had been so terrified of. He was going to run away.

For a week, he endured their smothering love, pretending he believed their lie. He let himself be picked up and carried around even when the gazes of the servants made his fur fluff in embarrassment. He spent an entire goddamn day in Philza's nest, tucked under one wing and happily chattering about what he wanted to see when they visited the mortal realm.

Look, he needed at least one thing to keep him sane. And that was the way his father would tense up, that soft smile turning fixed and his eyes going dark, whenever he spoke of visiting the mortal realm.

He was playing a dangerous game, he knew. If it wasn't for his family's reluctance to entrust him to others, he had no doubt they would have contacted the new Fae who had shown massive potential in the time domain.

That and for all the cruelty of his father, the other hated seeing him cry.

And so he sharpened his claws and lied in wait. He knew that he was being watched still. Guards were now more common in the halls and Technoblade accompanied him everywhere. The older Fae had always been the hardest for him to hide from. Once, it had been the subject of family jokes and Technoblade smugly declaring that he knew Fundy better than his own father, much to Wilbur's rage. Now it was his bane.

If Technoblade got one thought that he knew what was happening, they'd never let him go. He picked his moment carefully. In the festivities leading up to the solar eclipse, there were quite a few holidays. One that Technoblade looked forward to was the bloody massacre, meant to celebrate the older Fae's birthday.

(Trust me, you don't want to know what happens then. No, really. You don't.)

Both Philza and Technoblade were distracted with the ‘festivities’ leaving him in the care of his father. He had never been allowed to attend that part. Instead of attending, they attended the party for those less interested in the massacre part. At the height of the party, he sweetly requested that his father sing them a song. And Wilbur could never say no to him.

It took them ten minutes to realize he escaped into the crowd, and another ten before Philza and Technoblade arrived, still splattered in blood. By then, he was rushing down the mountainside.

He had a fairly good lead. In the snow with his white fur, he was practically invisible.

But they caught up to him in a forest. Fundy hid in a fox hole by a river, praying that none would see his snow white fur. Once, he had adored the color. Now, it was his curse as it stood out like a beacon against the forest. And all the while, he was tormented by his family’s casual conversation.

“I told you we should have never let him attend those parties. Now he’s gone and run off.” A deep rumbling growl and the scrape of an iron blade.

“I can’t believe he betrayed my trust like this! Fundy, if you don’t get out here right now-” Worse was the soft notes of siren song, the urge to stagger into his father’s arms ripping through his mind like a rusty blade.

“Mate, he’s already in trouble. After this, he won’t be leaving the nest for a very long time. So, I don;t think he’ll need his legs for a while. We’ll just heal him up before the ritual.”

If he broke cover, he’d be snatched up in an instant. His pure white fur stood out like a beacon along the border where autumnal leaves covered frosted grass. If he stayed, they’d track him down and drag him out.

And all he could do was pray.

See, there are many stories about Philza’s wife. Some say that she was a human maiden, whisked away centuries ago. Others say she was one of the first Fey who sprung from the earth and who occasionally needed to return for many years. Others say that she never existed, a story made up by the crazed king of Winter.

But Fundy had been under Philza’s wing and had the story whispered to him on the winter solstice, the longest night of the year. A story about a Fae who fell in love with something beyond even the Fey, one of the primordial forces of the world. A romance story with a lady whose power could only be captured through the word ‘goddess’.

But this story isn’t about their love.

He had never once met her but one thing he knew about her was that she valued determination and survival. The will to keep alive even through adversity. She was the one family member left who had not answered his request to see the world.

And so, for a moment, he prayed. Prayed for something that would allow him to escape his family, to finally find the freedom he desired. To see the world. He wished for fur that would blend into the world around him, to let him move unseen.

(And the price offered? That's between me and her.)

One second became five. Slowly, his eyes opened. His fur tingled oddly, making him itch. He took one deep breath, listening to the crash of trees collapsing and the cries of wild Fey who hadn't gotten out of the way in time. And then he bolted.

He ran until the world around him was painted in fiery hues.

His white fur stood out against the leaves. His newly orange fur didn't. Later he would find that returning to the border would cause it to whiten again. In the warmer courts, his fur was orange, allowing him to blend in. In winter, it was white. And so, because of his escape, foxes' fur change colors through the seasons.

And finally he was free.

(Good story, isn't it? I like telling that one. Ready to go?

Eret? What about them?

Fuck. Fine.)

Meeting Eret had been a mistake.

After his escape from his family, he wandered. For so long, the outside world was meaningless words, stories told to him of places he thought he'd never see. But he knew his family was still hunting him. The mountain snow was stained red in the blood of those immortal and mortal as they tore through anyone in their path. A price had been placed on his head, gold and jewels beyond reckoning.

He had dozens of close calls and after a rather terrifying incident where he had to reset his knee after Technoblade caught up to him and started systematically dislocating his joints as 'punishment', he decided he needed to get further away. And so he ended up in the Spring Court in hopes that the politics would slow his family down long enough for him to escape again.

He had really thought they hit it off, you know? Eret had made him feel... safe in a way he hadn't felt in a long time. They hugged him without prompting, and showed him the garden they were tending. The castle had a garden but not like Eret's, not as lush and flourishing. They had been so patient as they explained each of the flowers. The first time he pushed them away and ran, he thought they'd hurt him. But they didn't. They sent him a note asking him to stay safe and then waited for his return.

It felt odd, creeping back after that. But Eret made it better. They laughed, asked how his trip went, and it felt normal. Happy. And it kept happening. No matter how he left or how long he

stayed away, they never got angry. Never grabbed him in a bruising hug and whispered guilt into his ear. He trusted them.

So, when they asked to adopt him, he didn't say no.

It wouldn't be an official adoption. His family would have tortured Eret for even breathing a word of adopting Fundy, frostbite so bad that the limbs slowly died, being tied to an ice spike high above the ground with her belly slit open, the worst of the worst. And he would have been taken to the ritual immediately with no trick spared to force him through it. He knew well by now that his family would torture him if it meant getting what they wanted. As his father said, "It doesn't count if you don't remember it."

Anyways.

He was so sickeningly happy. Eret promised him a safe home, a place he could return to without fear. Comfort he had longed for but couldn't get from his family.

And so, he waited that day under the willow tree.

And waited.

And waited.

Eret never arrived.

Those honey sweet words, those lovely promises, they were all lies. They had never wanted to adopt him and couldn't even care enough to tell them the truth. No doubt, his story had already been spread around the Spring Court, the gullible little fox. Embarrassed and hurt, he fled the Spring Court that night.

It nearly broke him. He nearly went back to the Winter Court, accepted the pain and torture that would follow. At least he would be loved, at least at the end of it, Wilbur would carefully wrap up his wounds, and Philza would take him to the nest, and Technoblade would read him a story. But he didn't make it far enough before coming back to himself, his fur keeping him hidden as he turned back.

He wasn't going to listen to their honeyed words again. Just like Eret's they were all lies. Lies he had been foolish enough to believe. He needed to keep going, by himself.

Instead, he stopped in Autumn. It took every single one of his tricks but he convinced Schlatt to allow him to stay. The old goat thought it was hilarious to have Wilbur's son in his Court. Not quite an Autumn Fae, but with the role of one. It wasn't the easiest work sometimes but it kept him safe and it was fun.

And he didn't need to see Eret again. Until now.

Fundy's been going through it. Too bad none of his family seems to care he doesn't want to become a fox kit again.

sometimes you've got to spill your entire life story because you've found one of the few people who understands how suffocating being loved can feel

Alliums

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tubbo blinked slowly. Fundy was panting slightly, looking away from him. From how he looked, tail drooping and shoulders slumped, it looked more like they had finished sprinting a marathon rather than telling a story.

“Well.” Tubbo said diplomatically, sitting back. His muscles ached as he settled on the ground, thinking it over. “I was kind of expecting a short explanation, maybe a quick one sentence summary. But that’s okay. You good, man? Seemed like a lot.”

Fundy barked out a laugh. “Yeah, kind of all slipped out there?” He said, flashing a fanged smile. “I don’t get to talk about this often, you know? Too easy for stuff like that to get held against you and I kind of still have a bounty on my head.”

“Not worried I could use that against you?” Tubbo said skeptically. He could easily sell out Fundy to the Winter Court. A plan flashed to his head, the promise of trading Fundy’s location for Tommy but he frowned at the idea. He had spent so long trying to save Tommy, but was it fair to sacrifice another’s freedom? He was pretty sure that would make him a bad person as he was pretty sure he would do it. Fundy being friendly now or not.

Surprisingly, Fundy laughed. “You can try.” He said smirking. “But it wouldn’t be my first time outrunning them. And you won’t get what you want either if you want to trade me for your friend. The Winter Court is possessive, once Tommy became theirs, he’s theirs. They’d rather double cross you and have both.”

“Oh well.” Tubbo said with a shrug, an awkward motion from where he was on the ground. There was no use trying to hide his plan, he was pretty sure pretending would only offend Fundy more. The fox shrugged as well, half mocking before they stretched their paws, a small popping sound making Tubbo cringe a bit as they rotated their wrists. “Will this be a problem? If you see Eret again?”

Fundy paused, thinking it over. “Maybe, maybe not.” They said. “Part of it was due to it being the first time I had seen him since then. So, I don’t think I’ll be as extreme the second time. But I can’t promise I’ll stick around if you try to bargain or anything.”

Tubbo wrinkled his nose. “Pretty sure that won’t be happening.” He said, pushing himself up so he was standing again. His legs wobbled but didn’t give out, Thank goodness for the Veil’s magic, or he would have needed a far longer rest to recover from that. “We should head out then. We can’t be too far from the border.”

Fundy hummed. “Almost there.” He said. “I’ll slip away just before you find it. I’m on good terms with Niki, but I’m kind of uninvited right now and the logistics would be a pain.”

“Not to mention running into Technoblade.” Tubbo said with a shiver. After that story, he hated the Fae even more. The thought of him acting that way towards Tommy, casually threatening to break their legs? It disgusted him. Even more so because he knew it would likely happen. Even with the magic addling Tommy’s brain, the other was a fighter. They would crave freedom just like Fundy did, and they’d suffer for it. The magic of the change couldn’t erase everything.

But conditioning and manipulation would take care of what wasn’t erased.

He’d kill them if he had to, Tubbo silently promised. He wouldn’t let Tommy suffer under their hands.

“Are you ready to go?” Fundy asked, interrupting his thoughts. Tubbo glanced up, nodding quickly. “Good, I do have work I could be doing.”

“I thought I was your work.” Tubbo said as he began to walk again. Fundy only laughed, following him. Prime, he was so tired of walking. Why couldn’t the Fey have more convenient ways to get around?

He was partially through the plans for a magic powered cart when Fundy disappeared, the only sign they left being a soft breeze whipping across his face. Tubbo glanced up, looking around before checking his compass. He was going the right way. Just a little further now and he’d be at the border most likely. Hopefully, he wouldn’t need Fundy from here on out.

He scanned the forest around him warily, but didn’t see anything. Was he that far ahead? Or did Niki not think he’d make it this far? It was odd that there were no more interruptions but he wasn’t going to look a gift horse in the mouth. Tubbo beamed when he saw a break in the trees in the distance, a lone evergreen marking the spot. That had to be it! The border!

And then the world froze.

Freezing cold arms wrapped around him, lifting him up off the ground. His legs dangled uselessly even as he kicked and squirmed. “Stop moving.” Someone whispered into his ears and Tubbo felt himself freeze involuntarily, shaking. He knew that voice. He craned his head up, looking into blood red eyes.

“Hello, Sisyphus.” Technoblade said.

“You’re not supposed to be here!” Tubbo said, his voice jumping up an octave. He saw Technoblade wince and he continued on. “You can’t touch me! The Hunt doesn’t resume until I’ll leave!”

“That’s true!” A feminine voice answered. Niki stepped into view, grinning sweetly. “He wasn’t supposed to Hunt in my lands. But we ended up negotiating a bit when I realized you had somehow slipped past Eret and Foolish.”

“This is cheating.” Tubbo hissed. But he knew the words were a lie, even before Niki reminded him. There was nothing saying that Techno couldn’t be a hunter. Just his own stupid assumptions on how far the laws of the Courts would stretch.

“Not really. In fact, I should be the one questioning that, considering you may have had outside help.” Niki’s eyes flickered to Technoblade and Tubbo tensed, wondering if the other knew Fundy was here. “Eret didn’t say who, but I was rather annoyed at how fast your pace increased.”

Thank the gods. He didn’t particularly trust Fundy, but the other didn’t deserve to be captured, even if they were kind of a jerk who was working for someone who wanted to capture him.

“So annoyed that I ended up negotiating with Technoblade.” There was a dry chuckle above him.

“Offered a rather good price to keep you in place until dawn.” Technoblade said. Tubbo looked up and winced. The moon had crept across the sky, perilously close to the horizon. He didn’t have much time left.

“Why are you doing this?” He asked, trying to play for time. He had no idea how he was going to get out of this. His hands were trapped behind his back, pinned between him and Technoblade. His feet weren’t touching the ground and none of his kicks seemed to do anything. In summary, he was caught between a rock and a hard place.

Niki shrugged. “Winning this would be rather useful for me. I could trade you to Autumn or Summer for a rather good price.” She reached up, cupping his cheek. “Or maybe I’ll keep you. Puffy loves children and I do too. You’ll get along well with Jack and the rest.”

His breath came in short panting spurts. But what did he have left to give? He already had his name up for the bargain. And Technoblade hated him. There was likely no price that could buy off the Winter Fae.

Niki smiled indulgently, patting his cheek. “That’s alright, you don’t have to say anything.” She said with a smile that could be called warm if it wasn’t so smug. “Jack.”

“Ayup.” Tubbo startled, glancing over. There was another Fae leaning against the tree. Red and blue glasses covered their eyes but they were certain that they were staring at him.

“Call Eret and Foolish for me, would you? I want them here for this victory. They may have failed but they tried their best.” Niki said. The fae, Jack, grinned. He waved at Tubbo before disappearing through the trees. “He was so mad you skipped past his traps. He worked rather hard on those.”

“Tell him I’m not sorry.” Tubbo spat. Why would he feel bad for the other? Those traps were meant to capture him and he didn’t want to be captured. “Don’t you feel bad at all? For what you’re doing to Tommy, for what you’re doing to me?”

Technoblade growled in his ear but it was Niki who spoke.

“What’s there to feel bad about?” Niki said, her voice like someone trying to talk to a child. All oily indulgence and sickly sweetness. “Your friend is now a prince. And whatever will

happen to you, you'll likely end up doing quite well for yourself! Even if Puffy decides we won't keep you, Summer or Autumn will love to have you."

He shuddered at the thought, fighting to keep the lump in his throat down. He wasn't going to cry not in front of these people. They didn't deserve his tears.

Unbidden, a tear slowly slipped down his cheek. Niki cooed, one hand raising up as if to brush the tear away. "Oh-

And the Tubbo winced as a sound like the crash of blades and ringing of war bells hit his ears. The arms around him tensed and Tubbo looked to the side, away from Niki. The sound ripped through his skull, making him gasp at the pain and shake his head to try and clear it.

Tehnoblade made an odd noise, like the cross between the rumble of a bear and the snort of a boar. Tubbo followed his gaze and his eyes widened.

Leaning against one tree, a mischievous smile on his muzzle, was Fundy. The casual way he leaned against the tree couldn't hide the tenseness in his frame, the way he shifted from one foot to another. He smirked, making that same odd noise that Tubbo belatedly realized was likely a name in a Fey language he didn't recognize.

Technoblade's arms tightened and for a moment, Tubbo wheezed, unable to draw in air. He gasped, kicking and smacking at Technoblade's arm. Were they trying to kill him? Here?

Briefly, he locked eyes with Fundy. The smile had disappeared, a soft frown appearing on the fox's face. He recognized the look in their eyes. Concern. Not the twisted concern of the Fey he had met, but real concern.

They're distracting Technoblade for me, he realized wildly. As if Fundy knew what he was thinking, the other smiled at him. That bastard. Now he couldn't say he hated all the Fey anymore.

But would it work? He swore his bones were going to break if Technoblade tightened his arms anymore.

Then, the tight grip suddenly released and Tubbo suddenly yelped as he was dropped harshly to the ground. He wheezed at the sudden drop, desperately gasping in air as soon as he was able. He glanced back just in time to see Technoblade charging into the trees, a flicker of an orange tail the last he saw of Fundy. He hoped they would escape. He was pretty sure. Technoblade was fast but Fundy had been quite fast too, and they had the blessing. Surely, that would be enough. It should amuse him, to be concerned about the safety of a Fae. Annoy him maybe. But he couldn't find himself regretted it.

He heard more than saw it, the soft crunch of grass between feet. Tubbo threw himself to the side, narrowly avoiding an outstretched hand. He scrambled to his feet, sprinting desperately forward for the evergreen.

Niki howled rage, turning. Her steps were fast but Tubbo held the head start, he twisted to the side, neatly avoiding her next grab. It was instinct that had him diving forward, under the

outstretched arms of Jack. There was a crash, a cry of pain, but he couldn't bring himself to look back. Not when he was so close, one arm outstretched to the bark.

Tubbo yelped in pain as he ran headfirst into the tree, slumping to the ground and shaking his head. He reached up, gingerly checking his nose and was relieved to find it sore but dry. No nosebleed or signs of a break. Good. Awkwardly, he pushed himself up glancing back.

He couldn't help it. Tubbo shrieked in laughter at the sight in front of him, collapsing back to the ground with his hands wrapped around his sides. Jack and Niki were struggling apart from a little pile on the ground, limbs still tangled. When he dodged, Niki must have been lunging at the same time, making them crash into each other.

"Oh, yeah, so funny." Jack said, finally untangling himself from the pile. "We'll see how funny it is when I put your head on a spike."

Tubbo wheezed, shaking his head. "You lost. You have to give me the Charm. That was the deal." He managed. A wave of buoyant relief filled him. The Charm! He had nearly forgotten about it during the hectic adventure. He laughed again, a sound of pure joy this time.

The last Charm. A smug grin settled on his lips. He bet Philza didn't think he would get this far. And now look at him! Before dawn, he had won the trial. The last Charm was his. Now, he just needed to get back to the Winter Court and complete his quest.

Gods, he was so done with the quest. He just wanted to get Tommy back and then take a nice long nap. No more Fey. No more craziness. Just him and Tommy, together like they always has been.

Niki frowned, clearly unhappy. "Are you sure." She said softly. The sweet coaxing of her voice was partially ruined by how she had to push herself up, prushing off her miraculously unstained outfit. More Fey magic, he bet. "The Charm is what you want?"

"Unless you can get me Tommy back, I don't want anything." Tubbo said firmly, pushing himself up to his feet. He had come so far, gone through so much. The Charms weren't just powerful objects or trinkets, they were a way to bring Tommy home. Priceless in their own way.

"You could be a prince." Niki said. Tubbo let out a low shuddering breath, pulling away as she stepped forward. He didn't want her to touch him. Because if she did, if she patted his back or pulled him into a hug, it would make it a lot harder for him to pull away. And she knew that. She was toying with his emotions right now. He had to keep that in mind.

But gods, was it hard.

"Puffy would love you. She's always loved children." Niki said. Tubbo tried to find his voice, say that he was not a child but he faltered. They just couldn't come out right. "You'll get hurt, if you go to the Winter Court. You may have your deal but they would do anything to keep their child."

“You’re fucked.” Jack said, far more bluntly. The red and blue glasses seemed to bore into him. “The Hunt was only ended when you went into other Courts. Once you leave, the Hunt will begin again and there’s only so long Fundy will be able to distract the Blade. As soon as he returns to the Hunt, you’re dead. You really want that?”

“Not really.” Tubbo said, trying for joking but wincing as it fell flat. “I don’t want to die at all. But I’ve come too far to give up now because I’m scared for myself. I’m more scared for Tommy.”

“That’s called a sunk cost and that gets people killed.” Jack said, rolling his eyes. “Seriously?”

“Jack, be polite.” Niki scolded. She sighed, smoothing down her hair. “Okay, I will give you your Charm. If you’re so sure that you wish to have it, I cannot keep it from you.”

It annoyed him how she said it like it was a gift. Tubbo rolled his eyes. He had dealt for that fair and square! She had to give it to him, the bargain magic meant that she was unable to refuse his demands.

Niki reached down, plucking an allium from its stem. For a moment, magic crackled around her fingers, tracing over the petals. Tubbo gasped, leaning forward to watch as it shrunk and twisted in her hands, becoming a beautiful charm.

With a flicker of magic, the Charm flew from her fingers, attaching itself to the silver charm bracelet around his wrist. Tubbo raised his arm, eyeing it for a moment. Four charms, four seasons. His quest was almost done. And for a moment, the chime of the charms was the most beautiful sound he had ever heard.

“This is our goodbye then.” Tubbo said, beginning to back away. Once he hit the Winter Court, they couldn’t pursue him without permission. But the areas between Courts were kind of a grey area especially as he was still partially in their territory.

And he wouldn’t put it past Philza to give out blanket permission for his capture. Best to leave quickly before the two decided to pursue him for it.

“Are you sure you don’t want to stay? You could be happy here.” Niki said. Jack watched from her side, quiet. Tubbo considered it for a moment, really considered it.

It would be beautiful, living in the spring court. He had always loved bees and he would be able to see them at any time. There were enough flowers here that he doubted he would ever be able to study them all. And for her casual cruelty, Niki had seemed kind. He could maybe get more leeway here, if her views continued and he was more than like a toy than a child. Though, that was not certain anymore. She didn’t act like Dream or Schlatt but neither did she have the same casual cruelty as she did in the beginning.

He could maybe even be happy in this spring landscape.

But he still wouldn’t have Tommy. There would be a gaping chasm at his side, a friend lost. He knew that Tommy would not be the same bright boy that he knew and befriended. Being

happy here would mean giving up both of them.

“I must decline.” Tubbo said softly. He couldn’t make that deal. Couldn’t force them to live with the consequences of his own selfish desires. “Maybe someday you’ll find someone who wants that life.”

Because surely, there had to be at least one person out there who wanted to be the child of a ruling Fey. He wasn’t quite sure why they had latched onto him and Tommy out of everyone in the world. They had never been the first picked, never the ones who got a second glance until they met each other. And yes, Schlatt and Dream had explained, but those weren’t really explanations, not ones that made sense to him.

Whatever. He kept backing away, hands up and looking for an escape route. “See ya.” He said. “Or not. No offense, but preferably not.”

That finally drew a laugh with Niki through her head back and Jack snorting. Tubbo took the moment to turn and sprint through the trees. It felt like ages of tense waiting for footsteps to join the steady thudding of his own against the ground but eventually the sparse evergreens mixed with snowdrops and bare apple trees gave way to icy patches and frosted grass, forcing him to slow down. Snowflakes drifted through the air, almost lazily, spinning every which way. He shifted, slowly untying Schlatt’s jacket and pulling it on.

It wasn’t warm by any measure. It had been nice during Autumn but there wasn’t much to it to guard against the icy wind. But it was better than nothing. It still smelled like smoke, alcohol, and something vaguely like pumpkin spice. A strangely comforting smell and reluctantly, he pulled the collar away from his face. It was nippy but he’d deal. He didn’t want to get distracted with any pangs of loss.

He never thought he’d be so happy to hear the crunch of snow below his feet but he was. Because he was nearly done. No more offers, no more second guessing himself. All he had to do was get back to the Winter Court’s palace and he had a full day left to do it.

He chuckled, once and then again, shaking his head. Gods, Philza was probably going to be so pissed at seeing him again. Considering the other had wanted him to either die or join a Court, he wasn’t very sympathetic.

Tubbo double checked his compass, nodding when he saw he was going the right way. It would be a bit of a walk but the compass took a bit of the guesswork out of it. A fair trade in the end. He adjusted slightly, veering a bit more north, or what should be north, to make sure he hit it dead on.

He hummed, he’d have to keep a close eye on that. Occasionally the needle had veered oddly during his run through the Spring Court. He checked one more time before nodding in satisfaction and stashing it back into his pocket.

Before running into something warm and far too alive to be a tree.

Tubbo staggered back, wincing a little as he reached up to his still sore nose. His hand froze midway as he took in the sight in front of him.

Familiar horns. A smiling mask.

“Did you miss us, kid?”

“Looks like the rabbit didn't run too far away.”

Chapter End Notes

I don't think I've mentioned how much I love cliffhangers. Because I do.

Convergence

Chapter Notes

Been a bit busy lately but I think this chapter turned out well!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tubbo glanced quickly in between them, one foot sliding back. But the other didn't join it.

They were faster than him, he knew. It had been luck alone that kept Dream, luck and some very creative dodging. At this distance, there was no way that he'd be able to dodge in time, especially with Schlatt here as well. Running would just lead him further away from the Winter Court.

He wouldn't put it past them that that wasn't their secondary goal. If he lost this quest, lost Tommy forever... well....

He'd honestly try to kill Philza but still. They probably wouldn't expect that to be his next action.

"You shouldn't be here." Tubbo said, his words faltering slightly as he spoke. Because Philza could have allowed them. This close to the end, he wouldn't put it past the royal to try anything to get him to lose.

"Philza agreed to allow us onto his territory temporarily." Schlatt said as if he heard what he was thinking. Dream stood, mask tilted to the side but nevertheless watching Tubbo. "Not for very long, but long enough to pick you up."

Tubbo swallowed hard. Think. What could he do? "Both of you?" He said. "Last I checked, you aren't allies."

Fundy was out. Even if he wasn't still running from Technoblade, he doubted that the same assistance would extend to helping him escape Schlatt. Or entering the territory of the Winter Court. Their alliance had been fragile and he knew it. The fact they had helped at all when he was caught was still a surprise.

"Not both of us." Dream said, the shadows of his hood hiding his mask. "But we were trying to find a place to meet you and ended up here. Neither wanted the other to catch you first and so we stayed put."

Purpled and Ranboo maybe? Also unlikely. From how it sounded, neither could leave their area easily. It was also unlikely that he was anywhere near their house. Any help from their corner was unlikely.

“Then what’s this about?” Tubbo said. He couldn’t think of a plan. He didn’t know anyone who may help him. He didn’t know if he could outrun them and he didn’t know if he could hide from him. They had picked the area well, around them were broad evergreens but no bushes, no brambles, nothing that could provide a hiding spot or narrow escape for him.

“Well.” Schlatt said, drawing the word out. “We made a little bet, you know? To see who you would pick if the question was put before you.”

“Easy.” Tubbo said. “Neither of you.”

He just wanted to get to the Winter Court Palace and get Tommy back. Was that too much? Apparently by the dark look that Schlatt and Dream briefly shared.

“Not a choice.” Schlatt said, stepping forward. He slid his hands into the pockets of his suit jacket. “Look kid. The game ends here. You’re not going to get very far before we catch you and there’s no one who is coming to help you. We’re being kind enough to let you have a choice. Pick.”

Dream snorted. “You say that as if you won’t try to steal him away if he picks me.” He said. His voice oozed confidence and Tubbo shuddered. He really didn’t want to pick either of them. Picking one would mean throwing in the towel and surrendering to the fate that had dragged at his heels since he had entered the Veil. Since further back really.

“You say that as if you wouldn’t do the same.” Scholar countered. As if he was something that could be stolen. The Fey had weird standards for children, as Tommy would say, not Pog. That dark gaze turned back towards Tubbo. “Well?”

Tubbo hesitated, glancing in between them.

The worst part was, he had thought about it. On those long lonely walks, exhaustion making him slow and nostalgia too much to bear, he had thought about which court he would pick if he had to. Which one he thought he could be happy in.

That wasn’t to say that he knew what his answer would be. He had devoted far too much thought to it, excusing it under thinking of alternate plans for his loss. If Tommy would be immortal and he couldn’t just kill the Winter royal family, then he’d have to stay by his side even if that meant joining a Court himself.

(And sometimes, he tired of the memories that plagued him now, both old and new. Memories of when he was young, unwanted, unfit for a family of his own. Desperate for someone to look at him and call him a child and see him as worthy of love and care. Tired of seeing the villagers, tired and drained from their long game, waving him away. Of the sight of the gallows and those long nights in the dark.

Sometimes he wondered if it would be better to just forget those memories. Forget them and no longer have them hanging around like a ghost.)

But still. Both had good points.

Schlatt had been... oddly kind. His jacket still hung around his shoulders, even when it would have been easier to leave it behind. The other had been soft, the first one to hold him, the first one he had met. Back then, he had been painfully untested, no bloody memories haunting him when he closed his eyes.

Autumn had always been his favorite season and he had a soft spot for it's beautiful colors, for the smell of spiced treats, and the perfect weather. Not too cold but not too hot either. Maybe that's why he had picked it first, aside from all of the strategic reasons. One last kindness for himself before he went headfirst into the insanity that was the Veil.

As terrible as Schlatt was, he didn't know if he hated him or not. Not when the memory of a shattered shoulder and nearly being trapped intertwined with the other patting his head, holding him in his arms, and looking at him like he was something that needed love.

But then. There was Dream.

Bright, exuberant, vibrant Dream. The closest to truly alive he had ever seen a Fey being. The manhunt had been terrifying but exhilarating at the same time. He had enjoyed it. Running around while the others had chased him, when he entered the desert. Once or twice, he had lost himself to the feeling and forgot that losing meant losing his life. Either to death or becoming one of Dream's own.

Terrifyingly, he would play again. Not if he was going to die, and not right now. But he enjoyed it. And it was easy to get caught up when Dream spoke. The other had a casual easy going charisma, not quite like Schlatt, but with the same ability to hook him in. Make him feel like the other was someone he could trust. A trap of course.

There was an edge to that joy, a casual cruelty that reminded him that part of that joy was a mask. Confidence is another trap for the unwise. Those games that brought him such energy were cruel hunts for those people who got caught up in them. He had been lucky to escape.

Both of the kings had blood on his hands, more deaths than he could count in their histories. More names than anyone could ever know, more deaths than anyone could ever mourn. That his name was just another one for the list, another to be hunted, tricked, and then tossed away was a surprise.

No matter how much his brain insisted that this was a trap. That they were mocking him, feeding on his secret, pathetic urge to be loved. To have a family who would care for him. The moment he faltered, the moment he surrendered, they would turn around and mock him for ever believing that he was worthy of their concern.

But his heart insisted no. That this was real. That the look in their eyes was real. And if he surrendered, spoke those words, his fate would be well and truly sealed.

"Well?" Dream echoed. A burning hot hand came up, tracing his cheek. "We won't wait for an answer forever. Take too long and I might just decide that this bet isn't worth it."

Schlatt swatted his hand away, a disgruntled expression stealing across his face. "No influencing the decision," he insisted. "He has to come to you fair and square. If I can't pull

any tricks on him, then you can't either."

"I'm just touching him. That's hardly a trick. The fact you're so concerned about that says volumes about you really." Dream jabbed back. The air seemed to crackle like he was in the middle of a summer storm. "Maybe he doesn't want to say it because he knows you'll get angry at him for his choice."

"He wouldn't pick you." Schlatt countered. "You're dreaming if you think he would. What did you do? Chase him around your little desert? Try and kill him? Why would he ever decide to pick you?"

Tubbo glanced in between them, feeling a bit left out. He decided to remain silent. If the argument got heated enough, he could use this as a chance to slip away while they were distracted. It wasn't a great plan but it was better than running like hell and hoping he found someplace to hide within ten feet before they grabbed him.

"Yeah? And what do you have to offer? Eternal boredom? George told me about your trial. You asked him to find you a leaf. One would think that you didn't even want him." Dream snapped back, folding his arms. "At least I pulled out one of my best games."

"He only won because he used a technicality to do it. I had made the trial functionally unbeatable otherwise." Schlatt defended. "And the best game? You must mean your most boring game. I swear, you must play that with every mortal who enters your lands. Playing games is so childish. Fitting for the youngest ruler, I suppose."

Tubbo glanced in between them. Were they really going to start fighting? In front of him? What happened to the casual threats and the bet? Would they notice if he left?

"As if that's not what you're doing with your elaborate deals. Quackity and you practically invented card games." Dream argued. "How could you insist that my games are childish and yours are not?"

"Simple. I'm older." Schlatt said, grinning. Dream made an odd sound somewhere between the crackle of flame and the growl of a wolf. Tubbo slid one foot to the side, slowly, oh so slowly inching to the side. It was risky but maybe he couldn't use the distraction to slip out of here and they wouldn't notice him missing.

"Older and yet no wiser." Dream said, the words edged with the slow smoldering of fires in the hearth. "And greedy as ever."

"He was in my land first." Schlatt said loftily. Tubbo rolled his eyes. How did this conversation keep coming back to him? He longed to interrupt, to tell them where they could shove it, but couldn't. He had only crossed a small bit of the distance necessary to get around them. If they paid attention to him now, he was a goner. "How was it greed when I made the first claim? Can you really claim not to have noticed my mark upon him?"

Mark? What mark? Did he mean the jacket? What was a mark? Tubbo crushed the urge to look down, focusing on the small shuffle of his feet. He was almost halfway there. A bit

further and he could duck behind a tree, put some cover between him and then. He couldn't outrun them but a headstart could make all the difference.

"Oh I noticed." Dream said. "I just didn't care. You may have made a claim first but you were foolish enough to let him wander outside your lands. And I think he would look better in Summer's gold."

Schlatt made an odd bleating sound, clearly aggravated. "You are picking the wrong kind of fight." He said. "And are even more foolish than I previously thought you were if you think he'd be fit for Summer. He's nowhere close to one of yours."

Should he be offended? He was going to be offended. He was certain that he could be a Summer Fey if he wanted to. Which he didn't, but it was the thought that counted and his thought was that he could be anything he wanted so suck it.

Anyways.

Tubbo eased a bit further away, double checking and rechecking his feet for loose gravel or dry leaves. It was so hard to disguise the crunch of frost underneath their raised voice and any moment now, he was certain that they would look up and catch him.

"He's my fucking kid, Dream." Schlatt said. "I just let him wander off because he needs to know how much of a terrible world it is outside the court. A bit of failure builds character."

It took everything Tubbo had not to scream at him for that. Because he didn't fail. He won Schlatt's challenge, he won Dream's, Niki's, hell, he even won Karl's. Was it easy? No! No it wasn't!

To have Schlatt look at his accomplishments, dismiss them as some childish wish, stung. His teeth ground together and Tubbo forced himself to maintain his same slow pace. Almost there. Just a bit longer and he'd be behind cover, a little bit of protection against them. Maybe a bit pathetic to hope a tree would hold them back for long but it was a second more he wouldn't have in his opinion. A bit of cover to move further away.

"Your kid." Dream said. The air shimmers around him as if caught in a heat haze, the frost melting away from his feet. Even from this distance, he could feel the heat waves radiating off of the man. "How dare you? I've claimed him, I've marked him with magic, he's mine."

No- Tubbo's breath caught in his chest. The blaze roared. Even now, an emptiness yawned in his chest. That must be what the mark was. A bit of magic, just a bit, fey touched. Never to fit into the mortal realm quite right again. Always a bit different, always a bit off.

He should have caught onto it sooner. It just- It didn't matter. He couldn't afford to get shaken up too much now. Tommy would be fey touched as well, they'd figure it out together. They didn't need to go to the village much anyways, a few more years and their farm would be big enough to sustain themselves without having to trade.

They'd figure it out. Tubbo held that thought in his mind. And if Tommy chose to stay in the Fey realm, he'd figure it out here as well. The marks weren't going to ruin him. He was still

Tubbo, still himself, and nothing could change that.

Just a bit further now. His foot slid behind the tree and ever so carefully, he pivoted to slowly begin inching around it. It was dangerous to take his eyes off of them but the two Fey kings were distracted by their argument.

“If you had marked him properly, he would have stayed with you. But you couldn’t even manage that.” Schlatt growled. Was it just him or was there an odd echo to his words now? Something ominous that played on the edges of his nerves, made the sunlight on the snow flicker. The hairs on the back of his neck stood up. “It was clearly too weak to take or it wasn’t fit to take root in him to begin with. And I know what I’m betting on.”

Dream straightened up, one hand dropping to his waist. There was a flicker of purple and Tubbo’s eyes caught the outline of a sharp blade before Dream moved his hands away. “Ask him then. Have the kid tell you how much he enjoyed our run in the sand dunes, how he played my games as willingly as any of mine.”

Tubbo’s breath caught in his throat. The jig was up. The brief moment of freedom was over.

He turned and bolted away, barely catching the angered shout behind him. Not enough, beat his heart like the thudding of a drum. Maybe if he could have gotten a bit farther, found cover. But he had only made it a handful of feet away and there was no cover to be seen.

“Really, kid?” Schlatt sighed. His voice echoed in the wind. “Running again? Haven’t you figured out it’s pointless?”

He could already hear the slow thudding of footsteps behind him, catching the flicker of lime green out of the corner of his eyes. As certain as a predator, always just a few steps behind him. He could practically feel the impending strike, like lightning flickering through the air, waiting for a moment.

Dream was playing with him. Toying around with the moment, letting the anticipation build until his heart was fit to beat out of his chest. Tubbo put on a burst of speed, desperate adrenaline coursing through his system but it wasn’t enough. The lime green lingered along the edges, the occasional crackle of frost the only warning he had of the other.

Schlatt was following as well he knew. The breeze flickered around him, at times nearly strong enough to make him stumble, before pushing him forward again. A game. A mocker. A show of power.

He was going to lose, he realized desperately. They clearly considered this a game but the moment he got too far, the moment he crossed some invisible border, they’d snap this game to a close.

“I should put you in a tree for this. Exercise is not my thing.” Schlatt said. Tubbo shuddered, his footsteps stuttering, almost tripping. “That could be a good idea. You’ll have plenty of time to think there. Plenty of time to get your priorities straight. I could make you beg me to let you out. Calling me dad would work.”

Never. Never. Tubbo swore he would never cave. He had heard of the horrors of the Autumn Court's punishment, the mental toll it took. But he wouldn't let himself be forced into this.

"Your thinking is all wrong." Dream said. "If he wants to run, you should let him. Maybe I'll send up a nice manhunt, a real one after taking him back. Wolves nipping at his heels, no time to rest, he'll run until he apologizes for his rudeness."

No. No!

Neither of those options sounded good. But no matter how much Tubbo ran, or the desperate bursts of speed he found hidden in his tired body, he couldn't outpace them. And with every step, he could feel the end growing closer. The lime green was closer now, the wind beginning to tug more insistently. They were about to run out of patience.

He had come so far. Fought so much. And just to lose now? To lose with four shiny charms on his wrist?

For a moment, his fingers twitched, the yawning chasm opening. He could pull on the Charms. He knew there was magic in them, people had said he might be able to harness it. One tug and it might be enough to cause a distraction or keep him ahead. And for once in this horrible horrible run, he would have the upper hand. Philza never said that he couldn't.

No. Not yet. If he attacked them with magic, he would totally fail. Succumb to the void in his chest that craved magic, that longed for the power ingering in those charms. He might win in the short term but long term, he'd lose soon after. Snapped up by a court, unable to fight in that state of euphoria he remembered last time. He didn't even think he'd put up a fight at all.

He'd save that.

But then, what? What else did he have left? Tubbo searched through the stories he knew, considering. There was a bit he remembered, Fundy's story. They had said someone had helped him, someone with power to rival the Fey rulers.

He wasn't religious. Had never been the type to get down on his knees and pray. They lived in a messed up world and if there were true gods out there, he had no doubt that they had to be just as bad as the Fey to have not helped anyone.

There was also the common story of a Fae building a cult or finding a religion to be an insult worthy of execution that had dissuaded him further. Religion had been impractical at best, a death sentence at worst.

But now, racing through the snowy forest, Tubbo found himself doing something he never thought he would do.

He prayed.

Had a lot of fun writing this. Less plot, but I really enjoyed getting to explore the interactions of Dream and Schlatt. Especially when they're both trying to adopt the same kid.

Also, woo Kristin time! I've been so excited to write this part. In a world where Fey exist, where mortality and immortality, no power and power, has such a heavy effect on people's actions, gods are a very interesting subject.

Words from Above

Chapter Notes

Unless otherwise stated, Tubbo's spoken words are actually thought.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Silence reigned. His heart dropped into his stomach. Of course, nothing happened. It was probably a little joke of Fundy's. A little trick to play on the human. Or maybe, the fun little embellishments people liked to add when they tell a story.

And he had been the fool who had taken it seriously. Tubbo skidded to the side, grimacing at the false laughter that echoed in the air. And now, he wasn't quite sure what he was going to do.

This was why he wasn't religious. There were no kind gods in this world. No one who looked at orphans and offered a hand up, a way out. No one who did something for those in need just because they asked. If there were any gods out there, they had to be some cruel mot-

"That's rude. And after I took the time out of my day to come visit you."

Tubbo stumble, barely regaining his footing before he fell. The wind tugged him back, tugged him down but he kept running forward, mind half on the voice he had just heard.

This wasn't a normal voice. Not one of the light voices he had heard in the village, or the strange voices of the Fey which were always ever so slightly off. Nothing he could describe but a difference that was always somehow present. A little more whispery, a little more of a hiss, a crackle, unnatural sounds interweaving with the words.

The voice was somehow more and less. It echoed from everywhere and yet nowhere. It was somehow the voice of a young girl, an old grandmother, and a woman at the prime of life. A funeral dirge and a mourning bell.

It carved into his brain, slipped inside, and filled his head up until he could hear nothing but the voice. No more of Dream's wheezing laugh or Schlatt's mocking words. Not even the soft sound of the breeze through the tree tops or the crackle of snow under his feet.

"Fundy's grandmother?" He thought cautiously. There was a quiet laugh, making him gasp a bit for breath. If her voice was too much then her laugh was completely overwhelming. His brain scrambled for sounds to translate it and came up with nothing. And yet, he knew it was a laugh. Knew it to his very bones.

"That's not a common name for me." She mused. "A true one, I suppose. For one could say I am their grandmother. But not my typical title."

“Then what name should I use for you?” Tubbo thought, gritting his teeth as he fought his way through the pleasant chitchat. He didn’t have time for this. He didn’t know where or when, but his run would come to an end. And if he couldn’t strike a deal before time was up, so would his quest.

Judging by the soft laugh, the amusement in her tone, his annoyance wasn’t well hidden at all. “Kristin will do I suppose. No need to bring in the fancy titles for it. So what has a mortal like you so desperately praying to a god that you don’t know the name of?”

Kristin? It was awfully plain for a goddess. Not something he would have thought of. Then again, her husband was named Philza. Maybe it was an odd Winter thing.

“I was hoping for assistance.” Tubbo thought, He hopped over a log, ducking under a low hanging branch. “I’m trying to outrun the kings of the Autumn and Winter Court and, well, failing. Just a bit.”

“Why?” Kristin asked. “Why not just slow down? Death comes for all mortals in the end. Running will not take you further away, it only ensures that you will be tired and afraid when you finally enter my realm. Slow down. Think of it as falling asleep.”

Did she not know who he was? His quest? He kind of assumed she would, thinking that surely Philza would have mentioned it to his wife. Maybe Fey did things differently. “I can’t for if I fail, I’ll become Fey and so will my friend. He was taken by the Winter Court.”

“Oh. The little one. Yes, Philza has told me about his plans for another son. I have seen them, looked at the lines of their life. You must be Tubbo. Your line is interwoven quite tightly with his.”

Was that a good thing, Tubbo wondered. Before he could ask, she continued. “It happens sometimes, in souls who are meant to be together whether romantically or as family. It takes years for it to happen so having it so young is rare. Notable. You must love him very much.”

“Which is why I want him back.” Tubbo thought. “They stole him from me, enchanted him. And now, at the end of my quest, I don’t even have a fair chance at bringing him home.”

“Life isn’t about fairness.” Kristin said. “Death is fair. Everyone meets it in the end, whether they be rich or poor, cruel or kind. Life is not fair. And I don’t see why I should help you out of fairness.”

“Why not?” Tubbo thought. “If we’re soul bonded or whatever, shouldn’t we stay together?”

“Soul bonds can happen with multiple people. Centuries go by and you can find that your friend has bonded into his new family quite well. Philza treats his sons well and loves them fiercely. The love they have for him is no cheap manipulation.”

“But it is right now.” Tubbo thought. He knew he’d have to fight this uphill battle to convince her but it was hard to answer her calm wording while also trying to focus on his feet. He stumbled under the force of the gust, barely regaining his footing this time. “They didn’t ask.

They didn't care what he wanted. They enchanted him, put a shard of winter in his heart, and stole him away. That's not how you make a family."

"That's your opinion but I suppose I will acknowledge it for the sake of discussion. If you truly believe that, then will you let Tommy stay if he wakes up and says he wants to be prince? That he wants the love they have to offer? Spurns your bond and turns away? It has happened before. Soul bonds can snap."

No was his first thought. He couldn't accept it. He and Tommy had always been together, a duo, meant to be. But deep below, he knew a different answer. Something tired, a little ember stoked with the memory of cold lonely nights and cruel people on the road. "Yes." Tubbo said, his eyes growing warm. "If he tells me he never wants to see me again, gives his everything to the winter court, I'll let him."

Because Tommy deserved love. He deserved the world. He deserved nice things to happen to him, a family to care for him. Tommy deserved to be selfish, even if it felt like a blade was peeling away his skin, exposing his beating heart to the world. He would mourn, scream, lash out at Tommy if the other wanted to abandon him, but he wouldn't stop him.

But only if that's what the other wanted to do. If this family was something they wanted and not the echo of magic in their blood. If he wanted to leave Tubbo in the past not because the Winter Court didn't want their newest prince to be friends with a mortal, but because he wanted it. As long as that doubt remained, he would fight for Tommy.

"That's quite kind of you." Kristin said. "You could take the easy route here. Allow yourself to be selfish. Either of the royals at your heels or the royals back in Spring would snatch you up. Make you happy, give you a home. Why not allow yourself to be selfish?"

"It's one thing if Tommy chooses to leave me behind. I have my own choices to make." Tubbo thought. He was wheezing a bit now, his pace dragging slightly. The Veil magic couldn't quite keep his faltering body at tip top shape. "I could choose to be mortal. I could choose to join a Court. I could even choose to die. His choice doesn't effect mine. But right now, if I make my choice, that means Tommy loses his."

"Kind." Kristin repeated. There was an odd tight feeling in his head, a pressure that was growing to be too much. "We're running low on time. Mortals aren't meant to talk to the gods."

"Then maybe we should cut to the chase." Tubbo said. As if this hadn't been what he wanted from the moment he started the conversation. "I want to continue on my quest, to make it to the winter palace safely."

"And I want something different." Kristin said. There was a soft humming sound like the crash of a whirlpool. He had seen one once, when they had skirted a lake that had been cursed by an angry Fey. Just a few hours before, one of the locals said, that whirlpool dragged down a full fishing boat. Three lives lost, just like that. In a snap.

Listening to her voice, he could almost hear the terrible crash of the waves, the moaning of a boat under too much pressure.

“Which is?” Tubbo prompted. He didn’t have much time to spend on this. And he really didn’t want to find out what happened when a mortal talked to a god for too long. For some reason, he had a good feeling it didn’t end in his wishes coming true and everything ending happily.

“I want Philza to be happy. I want my sons to be happy. Giving them Tommy would let them be happy. And eventually, even I will grow to love him.”

“That is.” Tubbo thought. He blinked hard, just barely dodging a tree. Was it him or was the world getting a bit blurry? “Probably the worst thing I’ve ever heard. Tommy isn’t a pet or a toy or a fancy cookie. He’s a person with his own wants. Maybe they’ll be happy but Tommy won’t be.”

There was no way the other would be. With how Fundy described his family, they would have to completely smother what made Tommy, Tommy. Tommy was clingy yes, but clingy on his own terms. He wanted affection sometimes and Tubbo cherished those moments, but sometimes his friend wanted to yell and throw things and stomp off.

And he doubted the Winter Court would let him. Changeling memory would likely ease some of the edges off, which was a big problem right there, but it couldn’t erase everything. The rest would be all them and they would make the remnants of the spitfire he knew miserable. All in the name of being family.

“Does that matter?” Kristin said. Tubbo gritted his teeth, unsure of what to say. If she hadn’t gotten a clue now, she would likely never would. “We’re running out of time. I will set my terms.”

“And what will I get?” Tubbo said, the wind tugged at him, nearly throwing him back again. He changed directions, not running back, but veering a bit away. Hopefully making no progress would buy him a bit more time. He couldn’t hear the thump of Dream’s footsteps or Schlatt’s voice anymore so he had no clue if they were growing bored with the chase.

“Travel. I will allow you to reach the winter palace and you can complete your quest there. Mortal as you strangely want to be.” Kristin said. “But in return, you will never leave the Veil.”

“No.” Tubbo thought. His eyes went wide as he stumbled, pinwheeling his arms to keep himself on his feet and sprinting again.

Kristin continued like she didn’t hear him at all. “For as long as you live, mortal or immortal, you will never step foot in the mortal world again. Neither soil nor water. The Veil will be your home for good. If you do so, it will break our oath and your life will be stripped from you. And your soul plunged down into the deepest, darkest area of the void. You will never see your friend again.”

“No.” The word slipped out, a soft whisper. He couldn’t hear it, but he could feel his mouth shaping the word, taste it on his tongue.

Everything he had done, the pain he had endured, the long days with no sleep or food, was supposed to end happily. Hopeful, he had dreamed of returning to their little cottage, half painted and frozen red paint on the ground. A little garden, ready to be planted and a warm bed. Tommy at his side while they talked about the future. Their future at the home that was supposed to be forever.

It wasn't supposed to be in the beginning. They had planned to move on within the month, certain they'd be craving adventure again. But Tommy had fallen in love with the shaggy little garden and Tubbo found himself craving the quieter life.

He knew the dream would be near impossible. Even once he won Tommy back, it would be a long uphill road to get back home. Not to mention the measures they would have to take to defend the cottage.

He had planned for it. Had drafted designs for iron doors, salt rings around the garden. He'd thought of how to get more red dye, the soft fabric Tommy loved to use for his project, what they'd need to trade to get thread. All red of course but Tommy loved the color anyways. It would be a fight but with Tommy at his side, he was certain that they'd make it work.

But if he took this deal, the choice would be stripped from him. In the Veil, it would be a struggle to get their hands on salt, iron, red dye, all the items that gave even a fraction of protection against the Fey. Tommy would be constantly exposed to the Fey who had tried to steal him and Tubbo may still be fielding his own trouble.

Of course, Tommy could leave him, return alone. But he knew in his heart the other would never go. Like Tubbo had followed him into the Veil, Tommy would follow him out. And if he couldn't leave, Tommy would stay right by his side.

It had a cruel sort of genius to it. Almost admirable if it wasn't targeted towards him. He could complete his quest but the goddess knew that by trapping Tubbo, she'd trap Tommy as well. Doubling or tripling his chances to agree to join the Winter Court or to be lured away again.

He'd fight again, go on as many quests as necessary. But deep in his heart, he knew that he would not survive the next. This quest was meant to be functionally impossible and he had pulled so many crazy stunts to make it work. Stunts that would be nearly impossible to recreate. He would have his victory but keeping it would become far more difficult.

He didn't want to say yes. Saying yes would mean accepting this future. Saying yes would mean trapping himself in this insane realm, leaving behind the mortal world where life wasn't always good but he knew the game.

"Yes." Tubbo thought reluctantly. The acceptance tasted like ashes in his mouth. There was no way he could outrun the predators on his tail. He could feel the tug of the wind, playful but taunting. The soft tickle of someone's fingertips brushing against his shoulder. Not quite grabbing but hinting. Drawing out the moment.

They'd snatch him away and Tommy would be left defenseless. At least if he accepted, knowing the consequences, he could bring Tommy back to himself. Let the other finally have

some choice in his fate.

And he was really tired of running. His chest heaved for breath, the world blurring around him. Amidst the ashes in his mouth, he could taste the rich copper of blood, acrid and disgusting. Dizzily, he wondered if this was the consequences Kristin spoke up. The mortal folly of speaking to a goddess.

He didn't regret it. Not for a moment.

"One moment then." Kristin said. Tubbo hissed as his head suddenly grew very tight and then suddenly emptied out, like a bucket pouring back into the lake. He staggered involuntarily, his boot slipping on ice and sending him straight to the ground.

He started to push up, desperate to continue running. The deal was set, wasn't it? He just needed a bit more time, just a bit more distance. And then he could escape this nightmare.

A warm boot pressed against his back, pushing him back down to the ground. Tubbo let out a shrill wheeze, the frost swimming in front of his eyes. "Looks like someone got tired." Dream whispered. A gloved hand traced his shoulders. "I didn't even bring you down, you did that to yourself."

"Damn kid, you look terrible." There was the soft crunch of frost and when he turned his head slightly, he could see the dark suit pants, still rippling slightly in the breeze. "Surprised you even lasted that long."

"Clearly you don't know him very well. The little rabbit is very determined." Dream said with a snort, another jab. Tubbo wished he had the energy to roll his eyes. Were they really arguing again? Standing above him?

How much longer until Kristin did what she promised? She said he would still be mortal, that he would have a chance to finish his quest. Could she go back on that? Were gods bound to the laws of making deals? He hadn't felt the crackle of the magic settling the deal, could he have missed it when he stumbled? Or had Kristin lied?

He gritted his teeth, trying to push himself back up and yelping as Dream easily pressed him back down. "Not now, the adults are talking." Dream said with a hum. Tubbo growled at that, trying again. This time, the pressure kept building until he was wheezing for breath, an aching forming between his shoulders. "Now, what do we say? That wasn't very polite at all."

"Don't touch my kid." Schlatt growled. The boot shifted slightly and Tubbo let out a soft gasp of relief as the pressure eased away.

"My kid."

Tubbo growled again, frustrated and angry alike. He was laying in the cold frost. His clothes were soaked through and he was beginning to shiver. Every muscle in his body screamed with agony and his head felt like someone had taken a hammer to it. A goddess had debated

with him, promised him a deal, and then disappeared. And these fuckers were just going to stand there and argue again? Talk as if he wasn't there?

Tubbo propped his chin up, twisting as best he could to get them both into view. He snarled, his lip curling back. "You are both absolute morons." He snapped.

And then his head seized, the world wavering again. A deep chill slipped in his bones, carving him out and pulling him closer. Distantly, he thinks he hears someone swear, the hissing crackle of flames. A cold hand grabs at his shoulder, the pressure on his back increases, but both are too late.

He crashes to the ground in a snowdrift. Tubbo pushed himself up with a soft groan, hissing as his hand sinks into the freezing cold snow. He reaches up to touch his head, certain he'd find blood. But his hands come away covered in the soft chill of frost, not the brilliant crimson he thought would be there.

Had Kristin come through for him? Tubbo glanced up, his eyes widening at the sight.

In front of him is an intricate archway made of ice, nestled into the mouth of the cave. It almost looks as if the cave was grown around it, the intricate loops and whirls perfectly molded to the stone. It gleams in the sunlight. He has seen it once, a brief glance as he ran by, and yet he knows what it is instantly.

The entrance to the Winter Palace.

Chapter End Notes

I just really love having Kristen in the story. They're so much fun, in that as the goddess of death, she both understands the value of life and yet doesn't value it herself. She likes seeing how far mortals go, how they adapt and struggle to overcome the challenges in life and yet, fall in the end.

Fun mechanic I didn't get to add but want to talk about, hardcore does exist in this world and it's because of Kristin.

Also, yes platonic soulmates exist. It's my fic, I do what I want.

Back to the Beginning

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He knew as soon as he stepped foot into the palace that the Winter Fey were angry.

It was like the air itself was holding it's breath, the calm before the blizzard. The cold felt like it was almost alive, clawing it's way underneath his jacket and digging into his bones. He began to shiver immediately, wrapping his arms around himself for whatever scant warmth it could give.

He slipped and skidded more than he walked. At some points, the ground was filled with jagged stone and ice, still glistening with crimson bloods. They'd slice his skin to ribbons if he tripped. In others, it was so slick that it was like a pane of glass. So clear he could hardly tell it was there. That was the worst bit in his opinion, the jagged area was at least easy to walk on, the slicker areas had him teetering dangerously at a few points.

He was almost certain that if he fell, he'd crack his head open. Screw probability and all that. He was pretty sure if the ice didn't get him, the Winter magic would finish him off somehow.

And the statues. He shuddered. If he thought the path down was bad, this was worth. Statues were arranged in periodic places along the dark icy walls, almost as if they were decorations. People, all of ages and places. Some were terrified like the young seamstress who had thrown her arms up to defend herself. Others, unknowing, a little boy midrun, looking at the ground as if searching for a fallen toy. Others were angry, a soldier with his sword raised as if about to strike.

The worst ones, Tubbo decided, were the ones that looked happy. The ones with a smile on their face, their arms wide or beckoning as if they were greeting an old friend. He tried to pick up the pace a little at those, shuddering at the thought of such a betrayal.

It was a message, he was sure of that. A warning. Go any further and he could be one of these statues.

It didn't matter if they were angry, he reminded himself, trying to push away the fear. He was the rightful winner. He had the charms and he had made it back before time was up. The Fey were bound by the ritual magic as much as he was.

He tried to focus beyond the creepy statues and found himself coming up short. It would be beautiful, without them, he decided. But hauntingly creepy. The walls were made of solid ice, and whatever unseen light lit his path, it flickered within the ice, creating shadows that followed him.

The path seemed to stretch on forever. No matter how far ahead he looked, all he could see were endless icy walls and a parade of statues before him. The end was almost shrouded in darkness, only to be revealed as, surprise! More statues and more tunnel. Woohoo.

His own shadow looked stretched, grotesque. Tubbo shuddered, choosing to look back down at his feet. "Are you done yet?" He said out loud. "I'm not going to turn around, no matter how long I have to walk. This is honestly kind of sad. At least the other Courts mixed it up a little. This is just a tunnel with a lot of statues and some creepy shadows. As Tommy would say, you get a negative ten out of ten, big man."

He was almost, weirdly disappointed. He didn't want something worse to happen but he had spent so long planning, scheming, and risking his life that this felt... strangely anticlimactic. Were they just not ready for him yet? He had been expecting at least Technoblade making a last ditch hurrah.

"You should get somebody to do your decor." Tubbo hummed. It felt good to talk. His voice sounded like he had gargled some rocks and his throat felt the same, but the more he spoke, the more the pain faded away. And when he talked, he felt braver. He tried channeling Tommy, the courage the other boy held whenever he talked, but felt himself falling short. Oh well. He could at least annoy them.

Good. At least that meant he'd be able to run again if he needed to. And whatever had happened back when he was talking to Kristin, the effects weren't permanent. "Like, at least a little color, you know? Is color forbidden here?"

Tommy would be so annoyed if he couldn't wear red. Could Fey wear red? Technoblade's cloak had looked rimson when he had caught a glimpse of it, but he wasn't very sure. Tubbo snorted a little.

Was this what shock was? Was he in shock? It was pretty possible. He had just been through a lot and his ribs were kind of creaking in a way that he didn't think bones should sound like. But he wasn't really a doctor or anything. When he had fallen to the ground and Dream pushed him down, it had hurt, but hopefully not in the bone go crunch kind of way.

He really hoped it wasn't shock. He needed his mind nice and clear, ready to deal with any last minute challenges. He couldn't lose Tommy because he stupidly lowered his guard at the last moment.

Or even more embarrassingly, he accidentally killed himself by aggravating his wounds. Tubbo felt at his ribs, wincing slightly. It didn't feel like anything was moving away from where it should be. But who really knew with ribs? Sneaky little things. Give him a nice arm bone, he knew how to set one after having Tommy break his a few years back.

"Can we hurry this whole thing up? Oh no, I'm so scared, big man." Tubbo called out. They couldn't have him delayed forever and he knew that they had to know this. Wow, that sounded weird. It would be one thing if he got lost in the woods, but the path he was on must lead to the Snow King. They could only push the boundaries for so long.

He had played the game and won, his will was strong, and he had just made a deal with a goddess. He was almost certain he could beat this.

First. He had to think. Tubbo forced himself to take deep breaths, looking around. If he hadn't found them yet, it might mean that the path he was on wasn't the right path. Or it was

the right path but also the wrong one because the entrance wasn't here. Or-

He forced him to take a few more deep breaths. Calm. It was hard thinking through the lingering shock and adrenaline rush but he had to make it work. It wasn't like he hadn't had plenty of practice while dealing with the nightmare that was traveling the Veil.

Tubbo glanced around, tapping his chin as he thought. None of the statues were repeating he noted. It was odd. If this was some kind of loop trap, he would think that he would notice the statues were reappearing. But the thought of it niggled at him. Why were so many statues kept here?

It felt less like a path and more like a storage center.

And more like a trap. Reverse psychology. If the statues had repeated, he would have known he was trapped in a loop. But since they weren't his natural assumption would be that he just hadn't walked far enough yet. That or he was completely off base and making this way more complicated than it had to be.

No. Focus on the possible trap first. This hallway didn't feel right. It didn't feel right that for some reason, no one had come to attack him or even to greet him. He didn't think Kristin had double crossed him, this did feel like the same ancient magic he had felt before when he had followed Tommy. But the path itself was undoubtedly different.

The entrance was here. He just had to find it. Tubbo glanced up and then behind him, thinking. He was pretty sure going forward wasn't the right move anymore. He had tried that route and failed. But going back didn't seem right either. He hadn't had to go backwards to follow Tommy, he would have caught the other when they doubled back.

And then there were the statues. Each one was covered in a thick layer of frost that radiated a dangerous chill. Whenever he drifted too close to one, the cold bit into his skin in a way that felt eerily close to the flower field and he had to move away.

It was when he neared a young soldier, caught in the moment of raising his trumpet, that he saw it. A thick burnished key around their neck. Tubbo glanced at it with a frown. A clue? His hand reached forward for a moment, ready to grab it-

And then he pulled away. Tubbo glanced to the side, down the long line of statues. Now that he was looking closer, he could see that each had a key on them. On necklaces, tied to belts, one even had it fused to a circlet like a ridiculous crown. Of all shapes and sizes and what looked to be enough metal to fully stock a treasury. Some had glittering gems hidden beneath the frost and other were so badly rusted that he could barely tell they were keys.

His lips quirked in a smile. "Well, this is a problem." He said. He raised his hand again, cautiously checking the air as he reached for the soldier's key. Unlike his near brushes, reaching for the key didn't bring the same biting cold. He dropped his hand and walked to the neck statue, a noble woman with a tattered fur cloak and bare feet. Her key was jeweled, the head of it shaped like a small bird. When he reached for it, there was no chill.

Tubbo began to pace along, surveying each statue that he passed closely.

The obvious answer was that one of these keys had to open the entrance to the winter castle proper. And that if he picked the wrong key, death would likely be his fate.

But how to find the right key? Each one of them was completely different. Should he dismiss the rusted ones, assuming that they would make their key more flashy, or assume that they would anticipate this and choose a more worn key? Should he go for one that was so clear it seemed it had been molded from the frost around it or one that was the same orange as Fundy's new fur?

Tubbo groaned, dropping his head in his hands. "I really thought I was done with trials." He mumbled, looking back up. Would there be a clue in the statues? As he had noted before, each one was different. Their clothes seemed to date back from every period of history he knew of from armor from kingdoms that didn't exist anymore to dresses that had been the latest craze in the village he traded in.

None of the statues stood out to him. It was an impossible set of criteria. Should he choose a key from an older statue, for the possibility of age based sentimentality? Or perhaps from a noble person, tying back to the royalty aspect?

He paused as his eyes fell on the next one. He hadn't met her. Had never once seen her before in his life and yet, he knew her. Crimson hair that bordered on orange, her face happy, and her position like someone who was fishing without a care in the world. Unknowing of her fate. Or the fate of her child.

Fundy's mother.

The key around her neck was a tiny piece of golden metal as small as his thumb nail. It had no jewels except for a single emerald that glittered in the handle.

It made sense. It had sentimentality, it was hidden, if he didn't know Fundy's story, he never would have noticed her. Tubbo reached for the key but at the last moment, he paused again. Just a hair more and he'd touch the key. But something whispered that he was wrong. That this was too perfect, too coincidental.

Technoblade would have known he had met Fundy. Might have guessed that Fundy and him would talk, that his mother may have come up. Tubbo withdrew his hand, eyeing it before turning away. How perfect this all felt.

"A key for a door." He said. And yet, there was no door here. He was surrounded by keys and yet, there was no door.

What if his original theory was wrong? What if every key was the trap? It would be a truly devious one. Weary travelers would arrive and assume the same possibility. But no matter how good their skill at guessing, they would never pick the right one. No one would enter but those the Winter Court wanted to.

The perfect trap for someone who had a habit of overthinking things. And even worse under the pressure of a ticking clock. Tubbo hummed, glancing back down the hallway and trying

to control his speedy heartbeat. How much time did he have until Schlatt and Dream caught up to him? Would Philza allow them into the castle to capture him?

Part of him said no, there was no way the Winter King would allow the two into his home especially with how dangerous Fundy had described the possessive tendencies of the royals. But part of him said yes, that Philza hated him so much that he would allow the two kings to enter his castle to capture him.

Tubbo groaned, dubbing a hand over his face. "Stress I really don't need right now." He mumbled. He was split, one part of him trying to plan for the possibility of Fey coming after him and the other trying to work out how to find the entrance.

He hated the uncertainty of his situation. In here, he had no sense of time, the sun no longer above him to give him a vague reminder of how long it had been. It had felt like he had walked for hours but it could have only been for a few minutes. His hands tightened at his sides, the bite of pain from his nails digging into his skin keeping him calm.

He'd hear them coming, he reminded himself. There was no way that they'd stay quiet. For now, his focus needed to be on getting past this trap.

If he was an entrance, where would he put it? The ceiling and floor were clear, he had checked them multiple times. Which had to mean whatever it was, it was hidden along the sides.

Not the statues, he dismissed them immediately. While the element of randomness could have appealed to the Winter Fey, it was a bit too random, a bit too uncontrolled. Random luck could lead to people they didn't want inside. And it was funnier, or at least it might be to Fey, to have the entrance be something obvious and have a few convoluted red herrings.

So whatever it was, it had to be straightforward enough to slip under his radar. What would a Fey consider funny? Tubbo surveyed the walls, trying to keep his eyes away from the shadows that danced within the ice-

Wait.

He looked at the wall, watching the shadows move and twist. His own shadow stared directly back at him. But that didn't seem right. With how the light in the corridor looked, his shadow should be more angled, the long drawn out figure slumped on the floor. But his shadow hadn't moved, perfectly his height and directly across from him. Tubbo stepped closer, noting how the shadow still didn't move. As if it was waiting for him.

This could be a trap. A red herring under a pile of red herrings. He could plunge into this and find himself teleported into a cell or maybe dumped at Schlatt or Dream's feet. That is, if Philza doesn't decide to just turn him into a statue.

But something about this feels more fitting, more right. It's simple enough that he would have missed it easily and the shadows held a strange sort of terror to them. Exactly the sort of thing that a person would try to ignore and thus never notice how their own shadow wasn't changing. And it would be easy to leave a clue for those the winter court wanted to enter.

He didn't know how much time he had left. It was either this or the keys but he didn't have much time left to stand around and think. Tubbo gritted his teeth, stepping closer again. If he failed here, he would know he had given it his all. But he really didn't want to fail here. He wanted to succeed and bring Tommy back home.

In. Out. Take a deep breath. It's just like jumping into the pond back home, Tubbo reminded himself. There was nothing different between jumping into the chilly waters of the pond and this. He glanced back at Sally one last time.

"I hope your son gets to meet you one day." He said. And hoped he might meet her one day too. He had some burning questions to ask her to see how she went from another villager to a statue in this hall, the mother of a Fey prince.

Enough. Tubbo took one last step, shivering at the icy chill radiating off the wall. This close, the shadowy ice was all he could see. There seemed to be nothing past his shadow, just dark ice as far as he could see. "I really hate these games." He mumbled. And then he stepped forward.

An icy chill engulfed him like plunging into an icy cold pond and for a moment, his heart seized, certain he had chosen wrong and dommed himself. That after so long running, hiding, and playing games, he had finally made a mistake.

And then he was stumbling forward as the ice melted around him, putting his arms out to balance himself. Tubbo looked up, gasping slightly as his eyes met with cold blue.

"You came back." Philza said, reclining in his throne. And he wasn't alone. Technoblade and another Fey, likely Wilbur, stood on either side of his throne. And if looks could kill, he would be a statue by now.

Tubbo swallowed, clearing his throat. "I did." And his gaze dropped to the scene before him and his throat seized, a burning feeling growing behind his eyes. "Oh, Tommy."

Tommy had been moved since he was last here, now laying on the altar instead of slumped against it. His skin had paled drastically, from sun kissed tan to near ghostly pale, making his golden hair stand out even more vividly. His chest rose and fell, so slowly that he almost missed it. Someone had tucked a blue cloak around him like a blanket, frost still covering it. It took everything he had not to race to his side, take him by the hand, and beg him to wake up.

"Did you complete your quest?" Philza said. Tubbo couldn't tear his eyes away as he raised his arm, revealing the four charms. He could have sworn he heard Wilbur hiss at the sight. "Fine then. So be it. You may leave with your friend."

Tubbo smiled, a true one. Stepping closer to Tommy. Tommy didn't move. His chest slowly rose and fell, trapped in a mockery of sleep. "He's not waking up." He said, his eyes narrowing. "There's still ice in his soul."

"Oh, I never said anything about him waking up. Or removing the ice from his soul." Philza said, a dark glee in his voice. "I said that you could leave with him."

“But you-”

“A deal’s a deal.” Wilbur sing songed. “Congratulations! You have your friend back.”

But he didn’t, Tubbo thought. Tommy was asleep, still freezing over from the Winter magic in his sould. Even if he left with him, he’d be recaptured in moments. Tommy was heavy, he knew that from experience, and hard to hold when he was asleep.

“Tick tock.” Philza said. Tubbo could almost hear the smug smile in his voice. “What are you going to do little mortal? I won’t allow you to stay in my throne room forever.”

What was he going to do?

Chapter End Notes

This was turning into a monster of a chapter so I decide to split it here. Happy Holidays everyone!

An Ending

Chapter Notes

This has been a long journey. The first fic I have ever finished that wasn't a one shot or two shot. The longest fic I've ever finished. And I've loved writing it. I've loved reading your comments. Thank you so much for following this story all this time. I don't know yet if I write a sequel but I think this is a good ending for now! Changing of the Seasons will still see more updates hopefully, as I've got more AU ideas and side stories!

And have a happy new year!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He wanted to scream. That's what he wanted to do. All that work, all that danger. Every moment where he struggled between his own humanity and accepting one of the royal's offers. The casual cruelty of the village, the terrifying moments on the run. He had been in more danger on this quest than his entire life prior to it and he was an orphan living on the streets for most of it,

And now. This bastard, this feathery one step away from a crow mutant of evolution, this horrific monster, was looking him in the eyes and telling him that he hadn't won. That he had Tommy back, but not at the same time. All he wanted was to wake Tommy up, see the blue eyes looking back at him, and ask him what he wanted.

If he didn't have even the slimmest chance of winning this. Tubbo probably would have vaulted the altar and attempted to strangle Phil. Honestly, the option was still on the table. If he did here, he was going to haunt these motherfuckers for the rest of his life.

Except he likely wouldn't die, he thought sorely, looking at their smug grins and Technoblade's indifferent gaze. He'd probably be traded off to another Court where he couldn't cause any trouble and they'd get something in return. So. No strangulation.

Not yet at least.

"Tick Tock." Wilbur sang. "What's it going to be, human? I have a room to decorate, I don't have the time to sit and watch you."

Tubbo rolled his eyes. "I haven't touched him yet." He reminded them. The quest might have been completed, but the deal wasn't. Until he touched Tommy, he hadn't actually finished it out. Granted, that may have given him a grace period of about an hour or until the Winter Fey decided he had broken the rules of hospitality.

Wilbur rolled his eyes right back at him, the smug bastard. "Give it a rest." He said. "You've already lost. It was sad enough watching you scramble your way through the Courts, now

you're just going to sit here and think."

"I understand that may be unfamiliar to you." Tubbo said dryly. Worth it. Technoblade chuckled, making Tubbo flinch and ignoring Wilbur's offended look.

"He's got you there." Technoblade said. Philza's grin eased slightly, a little less smug, a little more exasperated. Tubbo pulled his gaze away, looking back at Tommy. He was terrifyingly still as he laid on the altar. Every breath looked like it could be his last.

His fingernails and lips are blue, he noted, not a good sign. If they were home, he'd be worried about frostbite and hypothermia. Here, he was worried about how deep the freezing process had gone. How long he had before there would be nothing left to save.

Philza might let him take Tommy, may even let him get home. But if he didn't stop the ice from freezing Tommy entirely, Tommy would head right back to the Winter Court. He wouldn't be able to help himself. The magic would call him home.

Tubbo had been cruel and done some terrible things to make sure Tommy was safe. He had let his silence send people to the grave. Had sent himself onto the gallows. But he wasn't quite sure if he'd be willing and able to trap Tommy in his home, listen to his screams and begs, even if it was for his own good.

There was a story about it, he thought, his anger beginning to boil. A young farmer who had saved their daughter from the Fey. She had nearly withered away at home, dying by inches as she wept for the Fae who had taken her. The anguish of the farmer as their daughter forgot them slowly and screamed at them with rage until they finally led her back to the forest.

Or didn't. In some stories, the daughter withered away until she died. The farmer's land was cursed and the farmer killed for killing a Fae.

In all his years, he had never heard a story about someone bringing back a Changeling. Trading a changeling for a stolen child, bringing back a kidnapped spouse, even charming a Fae to play at mortality. But never once had he heard a story that ended with a changeling returning to a mortal life. Whether that was because Fey refused to spread it or because it was impossible, he didn't know.

He wouldn't even have the luxury of bringing him home, Tubbo thought mutinously. Because Philza's own wife had trapped him in the Veil forever. All he had was a bit of red clothing and that would be nowhere near enough to make Tommy stay. Not unless he could somehow release Tommy from the magic.

"How much longer are you going to take?" Philza said, his tone bored. "I will not have you standing in my throne room for centuries."

Tubbo felt his nails digging into his palms, the pain promising that he was just shy of reaching blood. "I'm thinking." He repeated, biting his tongue harshly. His tease against Wilbur had likely just barely slipped by under the laws of hospitality. If he insulted Philza again or multiple times, they could call for a breach in hospitality laws and force them out.

But rage had filled his chest with a roaring bonfire and not just at the Fey before him. At himself. He should have called for a neutral place to avoid having to skirt hospitality laws. He should have laid down better rules about sabotage to avoid Technoblade. He should have negotiated better with Kristin or found a different route. Been someone who won but didn't get the attention of the Fey.

He should have asked for Tommy back, whole and healthy and as warm as he was. Should have known that the Fae king would twist their deals until he wasn't getting what he wanted and planned for it.

His anger was the worst of all because there was guilt underneath it. Guilt for not being more careful. For not being better for not being what Tommy needed. He had promised to save Tommy and he had failed from the very beginning. How could he call himself his friend, his family, if he couldn't do this right?

But. No matter how much he loathed himself, he loathed the Fey more. The smugness, the indifference to what they were doing. The fact that kindness was so foreign to them that they would twist his words to cruelly separate him from his friends. There was something wrong with the Fey, he decided, something twisted that ran bone deep in every Fae.

"Tick tock."

"Would you stop with the tick tock!" Tubbo snapped, beginning to pant. His body reminded him of how tired he was, of the cold that still lingered around him. He rubbed at his arms, trying to steady himself. "I know."

The cold in his chest yawned and he shuddered, making the charm bracelet rattle. Instantly his eyes went to it and an idea popped into his head. It was a terrible idea, one of the same design that had gotten them into this mess.

But it was tempting, still. Philza had said he may be able to use the magic in the Charms and he could almost feel the magic flickering inside, just out of his reach. The feeling had grown stronger with each Court he visited, the visit to Dream's Court making him yearn for the magic inside.

It was dangerous, the cautious part of him whispered. He had dismissed it before for a reason. It was very likely that using this magic would cause some kind of backlash, a deadly combination with him standing in the throne room of the Winter Court. A backlash that could very well keep him from saving Tommy and instead doom them both. There was the ugly yawning feeling in his chest, the terrible longing, that told him that if he used this magic then he would never go back. And where it would take him, he had no idea.

But, the deadly feeling whispered, did he have a choice? As he watched, the frost was beginning to spread over Tommy's skin in designs that would be beautiful if it wasn't for what they signified. With every moment, he ran the risk of either the Winter Fey kicking him out or the winter shard taking over Tommy completely.

Tommy would protect him when he woke up. And that's all he wanted. For the other to wake up. The other didn't have to make his choice with Tubbo fully awake and aware. And if

Tommy chose the Winter Court, well, he was fine with dying or being traded away. All as long as Tommy would be happy.

And if Tommy chose him then the other would protect him. It wouldn't matter how the magic backlashes against him because Tommy would protect him. And if he didn't... Well, he wouldn't be in a position to care much.

It was risky. So risky. There were so many things that could go wrong with this choice. But did he really have an option? Unbidden, his thoughts began drifting to which Charm would be best.

Not the Autumn Charm, he dismissed that one quickly. As much as he loved the season, he didn't think it would work well for this. Being one step away from Winter Magic would render it useless, the cold of Autumn being so different.

Not Spring either. The magic working on Tommy right now was strong magic, the kind that would take an extreme to fix. Either too hot or too cold. And the biting cold snowflake and searing hot flame could offer either.

His fingertips drifted open the charm option, considering. The Summer charm was the obvious choice. After all, what better to melt the ice than summer's flame? All it would take was a spark, a slight tug and the frost would melt away. A fitting ending for the shard that had taken root in his soul.

Tubbo instantly dismissed it.

He had lived in the mountains for years. When treating frostbite, you didn't jump straight to boiling hot water. If he tried to use the Summer Charm on Tommy, he could hurt him even worse than he had planned. Maybe even kill him. After walking in the Summer glade, he knew how high the temperature would go.

If the frost was flash melted, even if the shard was gone, it would likely ruin Tommy. Tubbo couldn't bear to hurt his friend like that.

But that left one choice then. A choice he was even more reluctant to take. It felt like proving their own notions about their superiority, giving into their arrogance. A choice that could just as easily backfire on him and Tommy.

The Winter charm.

Such an innocent little symbol. A charming little snowflake, that radiated the chill. Part of him rejected the idea, pointing out he wanted to get rid of the winter shard, not add to it. Piling more cold on top of cold wouldn't solve anything. But the other pointed out that maybe cold was needed here. Philza had used ice and snow to put the shard there and now refused to take it out. Maybe, with this charm of ice and snow, he could take it back out again. He hesitated, caught between his options.

"Why are you so determined about this anyway?" Wilbur said, staring at the ceiling. "I mean, wow, charming you got this far. Really didn't expect that. But why keep going? Why do you

have to be so selfish?”

Tubbo’s head jerked up, his eyes narrowing. It had not been an uncommon question during his quest, and not uncommon among the Winter Fey either, Technoblade had questioned his goal as well. But now, standing here at the moment of his failure or victory, it only stoked his rage. “I’m the selfish one?”

“Of course.” Wilbur said, waving a hand. “Tommy is so so bright. It’s like he carries the sun in him. He’s such a charmer, cuddly, cute, he’s practically the perfect little brother for me. And then you come along, all meh meh meh, you can’t have him. As if you’re not taking away a life many would beg for.”

“How dare you!” Tubbo said, more yelled. Technoblade’s hand dropped to his side, resting on the hilt of his sword. “I’m selfish? I’m the selfish one? You’re the one who ripped him away from his home! Who claims he’ll be happy when you don’t even know him! All the stuff you say makes him perfect is bullshit! Those are all things you used to describe a pet not a brother! But I guess it makes sense considering you don’t even know him!.”

His hand dropped to his wrist, wrapping around the snowflake charm. The cold was hard to touch, but he endured it, feeling the rage in his chest burn even hotter. How dare Wilbur say that to him, how dare he say it in front of Tommy. Tubbo was going to use this charm to rip the snow out of Tommy’s heart and then protect him from ever falling to the Fey again.

“Of course I know him.” Wilbur said, the temperature in the room beginning to drop. “I know everything about him! I’ve seen him laugh, I’ve seen him cry, and I was there! I know more about him than you could possibly comprehend!”

“No you don’t!”

“He’s my sunshine! My little golden boy, my precious warm treasure! Of course I learned everything I could! I know his favorite treat, that he loves cows, everything!”

And something in Tubbo freezes. His heart slowly drops away from the charm, something opens up in the back of his mind. Wires connecting. “How long.” He said slowly. “Have you been watching us?”

The last time they had actually talked about getting treats from the bakery was before the village trip, he was pretty sure. They hadn’t been planning a village trip for a while and dancing around what happened in the blizzard. And he was pretty sure Tommy hadn’t talked about cows much after the blizzard.

“Long enough.” Wilbur replies, the cadence of his words stilted. “Scared?”

Tubbo slowly shook his head, staring at Wilbur At Technoblade, at Philza, so stiff in their home. In a cold empty throne room with no one around them.

It was terrifying, yes, knowing that they had been watching them. Had possibly been watching them for a long time, long before the blizzard incident. And yet. It was so strangely

pathetic at the same time. The Winter Court, Fey that had wiped out cities and ruined empires. Spying on two boys as they built a life together, a home from nothing.

The anger in his chest seeped away, replaced with a strange sense of pity almost. How tragic it must be to be on the outside looking in. To return home to a cold palace, where you were feared and immortal and great, but that lacked all the same. They would live for centuries but he and Tommy had a home filled with laughter and loud voices and shared jokes. A home that far outclassed this place.

Sunshine. Warmth. Golden. Spoken as if these were rare treasures. He couldn't quite miss the edge of desperation in Wilbur's voice, the tenseness he saw.

Every story said the same. The Winter Court would never thaw. And that meant the people too.

He hated them. Would never stop hating them. Even if he pitied them, it didn't mean they were right. Tommy would be miserable here, even if he was given all the love in the world because this world would never change. The palace and its people were eternally frozen, always chasing after happiness, even when it hurt people. Fundy was loved but he wanted freedom. Tommy would be loved but Tubbo knew in his heart that the Winter Court would have to break him to get the sunshine they craved.

Tubbo snorted. Chuckled and shook his head as it all came together. "You couldn't thaw Tommy even if you wanted to." He said. Philza's stiffened, his hands tightening on the throne.

"The power of the Winter Court is far beyond your wildest dreams, mortal." He said, a chide easy to hear. Tubbo couldn't help the laugh that bubbled up, his arms spreading wide.

"That's not a denial. That's a dodge and trust me, I've gotten good at those." He said. He took a step closer to the altar, taking in how the three Fey stiffened. "You're ice. The winter's wind, the morning frost. You couldn't thaw anyone, no matter how much you wanted to. All you can do is freeze them, freeze them and keep them by your side."

So many statues. How many of those were Fey cruelty and how many of those were envy? Envy at the joy people had even knowing their lives were short. The love that was found, the memories cherished, the lives built through all the little experiences. A little boy chased a ball and laughed, and *felt* in a way that the Fey could never experience. A seamstress telling stories, a soldier going to war, a new mother fishing, all without the weight of centuries on their back.

And the changelings, immortals who would never change. Fundy, trapped as a child. Unburdened by time, so bright. A glimpse at a world both craved and loathed.

Tubbo took another step, looking down at Tommy. Sometimes his partner in crime, sometimes his rival, always his friend. They had written their own story together, in clumsy stumbling steps. In hugs, in fights, in quiet words as the fire died. "The first day you came to the orphanage." He started softly. "You tore the stuffing out of my bee. I punched you and started crying. And in those moments, I thought I'd hate you forever."

He knelt down next to the altar, watching the quiet rise and fall of Tommy's chest. "And the next day, I found the bee on my pillow and your pillow was useless. I was still angry. I cried again because I didn't know if I should be angry or forgive you. And you scoffed and refused to talk to me. It took weeks before we really talked to each other and it was because you'd gotten stung by a bee and thought you were going to die. I almost died laughing that day and decided someone who reacted like that couldn't be so bad."

"Mortal, is there a point to this or do you just like hearing your own voice?" Philza drawled. Tubbo ignored him, pressing on.

"When we ran away, I was terrified. I hated the orphanage but I was more scared of the outside world. The matron's stories made it sound terrifying and I knew that was on purpose but I was still scared. I probably would have died there if it wasn't for you." The matron had kept them alive but she really didn't care what happened to them after they left. Honestly, what happened to them during, there were so many kids that just disappeared overnight. "You had to push me out the door and I thought you'd get mad but you just told me you were scared too."

He reached down, gently intertwined his fingers with Tommy. They were so cold, icy to the touch and limp. If it wasn't for the steady pulse, he would have thought Tommy was dead.

"I thought you'd leave afterwards." He said softly. It was like they were in their own little world, just him and Tommy. "I was one of the littlest and I wasn't very strong. It took me so long to figure out how the world worked, how to plan and charm and scheme to protect us. There were so many times you got hurt protecting me. But you never left me behind."

It had terrified him, every time that Tubbo had done something stupid. That this would be the time that would finally be too much. Tommy would realize what everyone else did, which was that Tubbo was deadweight. But he never did, he snapped and complained but never once did he leave.

"You might leave me here." He whispered. "And stay with these people. For the first time in years, we'll be taking different paths. And it terrifies me. All this time, I've told myself that this journey is for you. All I need to know is your answer. But I lied. It's for me too. I need to know if this time you'll leave. I need to hear it from you. I won't let you disappear without a word, not like everyone else did."

He was pretty sure Technoblade said something mocking about his words, something about orphans but he didn't care. "I've made so many mistakes along the way." He said. "I can't leave the Veil, I've dealt with Fey, and I've got my own obsessive problems. But there are no mistakes I regret more than not noticing sooner. Letting you go through the struggle alone and assume that you'll get through like you always would. I got so used to thinking that nothing could ever touch you that I forgot that some things can."

"I'm sorry."

"And I love you." He whispered. And this time the tears really did come, slipping down his cheeks and raining onto Tommy's chest. "And I should have said it more. I love the way you laugh. I love the way you snap and snarl and spin from one topic to the next. I love how

you're always bouncing around. I love cuddling with you, working in the garden with you. Knowing that it's us against the world. If there really is such a thing as soulmates, I honestly think this is it. I will never stop loving you, even if you choose to leave. You could turn me into a statue, drive a blade through my heart, anything. And I'd still love you."

Tubbo panted for a moment, staring at Tommy. Engraving the boy in his memories. He had no idea what was next for them. But he knew, he'd never forget his friend.

"As touching as this is, I think it's time for you to go." Philza said. And Tubbo could hear the clanking of armor, the slight crackle of magic as Technoblade neared him. He let out a shuddering breath, this was it then. He wasn't leaving Tommy's side unless they wanted to drag him away. One last tear slipped out, darkening the area above Tommy's heart.

A cold hand landed on his shoulder and Tubbo hissed at the pain that accompanied it. "Time for you to go." Technoblade said, his voice holding a dark promise. Tubbo hung on, tightening his grip but slowly, he was being dragged backwards.

"No, fuck off-"

"LET HIM GO, FUCKFACE!"

There was a flicker of color, Tubbo lurching backwards in surprise as *Tommy* shoved him aside, slamming his fist into Technoblade's nose. Technoblade staggered back, one hand raising to his nose, his eyes filled with shock. And then Tommy turned to Tubbo, and Tubbo felt the tears streaming down his cheeks. And this time, they were tears of joy.

Because that was Tommy. His cheeks flushed, shirt soaked from the frost melting away. His skin tan from the long days they spent outside, the blue cloak in a puddle by his feet. Tommy squeezed his hand. "You okay?" He said.

"Always was a crybaby." Tubbo replied, beaming at him. "Your hand is so warm."

"Of course it is." Tommy said, matter of fact. Like he wasn't just sleeping on an altar of ice, one step above being ice himself. "Come on Tubs, I thought you were the smart one here. People be warm."

"Tommy?" Tommy stiffened, twisting so he was between Tubbo and the threat. Wilbur stepped forward, his honey brown eyes wide and confused. "Sunshine, are you okay? How are you awake?"

"You're the one." Tommy ground out. Tubbo squeezed his hand harder, trying to ease the tension he could see. "You messed with my head. You kept fucking sneaking into my room, but I couldn't remember to tell Tubbo."

He couldn't remember? Tubbo opened his mouth to interrupt, to ask what the fuck that meant but the fear in Wilbur's eyes dropped away, replaced by smooth confidence. "Honey, I never made you forget." He cooed. "That was all your choice. You were so happy when I hugged you."

“I didn’t want you to touch me. I didn’t want to sleep there. It was just so fucking hot I couldn’t think and everytime the window wasn’t open, it felt like I was scratching my skin open.” Tommy insisted. “You fucking, you tricked me. I thought you were my friend. I thought everything was okay. You made me think it was okay. I didn’t want to leave and you made me.”

Tubbo hated how raw the other’s voice was, the heartbreak clear as day. Somewhere along the line, Tommy had loved these Fey, at least a little.

“But it was.” Wilbur cooed, stepping closer. Tubbo started to tug Tommy back but the other placed his feet firmly, glaring at all three Fey. “You wanted a family. And you were so sweet when I offered it, so cuddly.”

“I heard you calling my name that day.” Tommy said, his voice cracking ever so slightly. If it wasn’t for his years of experience, he wouldn’t have even noticed. He pressed himself to Tommy’s back, reassurance that he was here, that he’d fight if they needed to. “And I tried, I tried to ignore you but I couldn’t.”

“You wanted it.” Wilbur insisted, his voice as sweet as honey. “And don’t you want it now? You could have the family you always dreamed of. A loving father, older brothers, as much cuddles as you want. You’ll never feel hurt or lost or confused again.”

Tommy’s hold slackened slightly. Tubbo froze, holding his breath. He promised himself not to interfere. If Tommy wanted to take this, he could. He promised. His heart lurched, caught between praying and begging.

And then Tommy squeezed his hand three times. Tubbo’s eyes widened, instantly catching the message. “If you really knew me. If you were a friend, if you wanted to be family.” Tommy’s breath caught. “If you loved me. You would have never hurt Tubbo.”

And then he turned and bolted for the door, Tubbo one half step behind. He heard the howls of rage and sorrow behind him, but he still felt like he could fly. Tommy had chosen him back.

They burst into the cold winter night, scrambling down the rocky path. The corridor had disappeared, gone as if it never existed. “Do you have a fucking plan.” Tommy yelled. “Because I sure fucking don’t!”

The words leapt to the tip of his tongue, *go home*. But home wasn’t an option anymore. But he did have one idea of where they could go. Maybe not to stay forever, but somewhere to lay low and come up with an actual plan.

“Follow me.” Tubbo said, leading the way down the snow covered path.

“Sunshine.” And it was so achingly sad that he nearly stumbled, Tommy’s tense hand pulling him up. The song of a grieving widow, the tears shed after a terrible fight, the lilting voice reached into his heart and ripped out his grief. He could hear behind them. “Sunshine! Come home!”

“Mate, I know this is scary, but we can explain-”

“Theseus! Get back here!”

“Are you really okay?” Tubbo said, panting. Is this really fine, he wanted to say. Do you really want me? Or do you feel obligated to keep me around?

“Of course I am.” And Tubbo nearly stumbled as Tommy pulled on his hand, bringing them shoulder to shoulder. “Fucking hell. Man gets kidnapped by the Fey and people ask him if he wants to stay. I love you too, big man. More than any Fey in the world.”

And Tubbo felt like he could run for a hundred miles if it meant Tommy would stay with him.

The voices grew louder and Tubbo flinched. They had clearly realized Tommy was well and truly leaving, and now they moved on to the threats. Sickening descriptions of what they would do if Tommy didn’t come back right now. Shattered bones, frostbitten limbs, threats for both him and Tommy alike.

“Once upon a time.” Tubbo said, his voice ragged with fatigue. “There was a young maid who used to visit the river every day who dreamed of being a pirate-”

Tommy glanced at him but didn’t speak. Tubbo forced himself through telling the story of the pirate and the fae queen, raising his voice to drown out their pursuers. And when he finally ended it, faltering for another, Tommy picked up the next.

“Okay, so, there was this fucking dude who decided he was the best at fighting-”

And so it went. Everytime one faltered, the voices invading the silence again, the other picked up with another. And another. Tubbo wracked his brain for stories, retelling even the foggiest tales he knew. At some point, he was pretty sure Tommy had started to make up his stories.

Maybe it was the deal, a word working to their advantage. Maybe it was a last gift from Kristin. Or maybe it was themselves, racing through the night, trusting only in each other. For even as the howl of wolves, the caws of crows, and Wilbur’s hauntingly sweet lullaby echoed around them, none caught up.

They staggered into the clearing, Tubbo looking up to see the small cottage. It looked exactly the same as his last visit. He swallowed hard. If this didn't work, he wasn't sure what to do next. “You sure about this Tubs?” Tommy asked.

Tubbo smiled at him.”As sure as I’ll ever be.” He said. He pulled Tommy to the door, raising his hand to knock.

It opened before he could, Purpled’s eyes glowing in the moonlight. He surveyed them both, frowning. Tubbo’s heart sunk in his chest. “Holy fuck. I can’t believe you survived, let alone brought him back.” Purpled said, looking at Tommy.

“Hey! Fuck you, purple boy!” Tommy snapped. Purpled rolled his eyes.

He stepped aside and through the door, Tubbo could see Ranboo sitting on the couch. He looked up, his look of concentration turning into a soft smile. Tubbo glanced at Tommy and then Purpled, half hesitating. "You can stay, but you better have a good tale to sell." Purpled snapped, not looking at them.

Tubbo's heart leapt. He squeezed Tommy's hand, not quite believing himself that he had done it. That his friend was at his side and safe. That in front of them was a safe place to rest. Tommy smirked at him, tilting his head in a silent go ahead. Tubbo smiled, pulling Tommy out of the night and into the warm firelight of the house.

One day, he will hold Tommy as the other tells his story. The story that Tubbo missed. And there will be tears and anger at the Fey that invaded their lives. They will talk about the hurt of betrayal, the craving for love. And they will rest at each other's sides and know that the world couldn't tear them apart.

But right now, they have a story to tell.

"Once upon a time, two boys were going home-"

Chapter End Notes

When I first started this story, the charms would have freed Tommy. The ultimate irony, the Fey's gifts turned against them. Winter being used to give freedom instead of take.

But that's not the irony this story needed. There was no great power that could thaw Tommy's heart. In the original story, Kai is saved with Gerda's love, her tears melting his heart. In the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, it was Orpheus' love that let him walk through the darkness, even if he faltered in the end. This has always been a story of humans, not gods or Fey. A story of love even through hardship, of choice even when facing temptation, of learning how to live even if it's only for a short time. There is no magical shortcut.

This was never winter's story. It was Tommy and Tubbo's. Two mortals who chose each other again and again, through golden days and long cold nights. A home built together. And so, it ended like it began. With love, trust, and intertwined hands. With everything that comes easy to mortals and impossible for Fey. Everything that was Tommy and Tubbo.

And the universe said I love you
And the universe said you have played the game well
And the universe said everything you need is within you
And the universe said you are stronger than you know
And the universe said you are the daylight
And the universe said you are the night
And the universe said the darkness you fight is within you

And the universe said the light you seek is within you
And the universe said you are not alone
And the universe said you are not separate from every other thing
And the universe said you are the universe tasting itself, talking to itself, reading its own code
And the universe said I love you because you are love.

And sometimes, stories get to have a happy ending. Or at least, a happy ending for now.
Whether it stays that way is up to you, my dear readers and your imaginations.

End Notes

Tubbo's doing His Best.

If you guys liked this, kudos, bookmarks, and reviews are all appreciated! I love reading what you guys have to say :)

And if anyone wants to do fan art of this story, I'd love to see it!! You can send me the link in the notes and watch as I quietly combust from pure joy.

Berry_Dory's incredible sketch!!!! Show them some love because this looks amazing:
<https://vm.tiktok.com/ZM8jVJxmU/>

And check out meendee's incredible animatic!! It's so cool!!
<https://youtu.be/hhtwsIE1ybK>

Goldi480 also drew this beautiful piece of art!!!!
<https://sta.sh/02a12yh7k6qj>

Sparkstrom drew fanart as well and it's so pretty!
https://twitter.com/sparkstrom_/status/1464646798790651906?s=20
https://twitter.com/sparkstrom_/status/1464672196375105538?s=20
Also the first meme!
https://twitter.com/sparkstrom_/status/1470235581049278465?s=20

Kindryte's amazing drawing of Snow King Philza! It looks absolutely amazing!!!!
<https://www.deviantart.com/kindryte/art/FANART-Snow-King-Philza-899695452>

Isleepsowhat made a beautiful fanart drawing as well!!!! It's so pretty!
https://twitter.com/isleepsowhat_04/status/1469300581646753795?s=20

Works inspired by this one

[That Peaceful Little Place Between Autumn and Winter](#) by [Anarchyatthesupermarket](#)

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